

A Systematic Literature Review of Language Learning Based on Social Media

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Abstract: Language learning based on social media has attracted increasing interest in recent years. Despite its popularity and utilization, a number of people have a skeptical attitude towards the impacts and outcomes of this emerging style of language learning. This paper provides a review of the literature on the use of social media in language learning from 2015 to 2018. A total of 17 articles were identified from 4 influential journals, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *System*, *Language Learning & Technology* and *ReCall*. A systematic content analysis method was employed to analyze the research directions, research purposes, theoretical foundations, research designs and learning outcomes of the selected studies. In terms of the research directions, foreign language learning and informal intercultural communication with social media are mostly discussed. With regard to the research purposes, they can be divided into two groups: from the teacher's perspective and concerning the students. Most articles explore students' language learning. As far as the theoretical foundations are concerned, among the 17 articles, 9 indicate the theoretical background clearly, and various theories are employed to support the main points. In terms of the research designs, compared with Facebook, WeChat, Twitter and other social media, language learning through blogs is the most studied. Taiwan has conducted the most research on social media-based language learning. The main outcome of these articles signifies the effects of knowledge acquisition, motivation, and intercultural communication. It is advisable that more research be done to explore the relationship between Chinese social media users such as Chinese WeChat users and their language learning.

Keywords: Social media, language learning, literature review, content analysis

1. Introduction

Unlike previous generations, today's learners are surrounded by interactive media-sharing technologies leading to different learning styles (McBride, 2009). The advent of Web 2.0 tools and various electronic devices has led to the emergence of hybrid or blended learning (Buzzetto-More & Sweat-Guy, 2006; Goertler, 2011; Graham, 2005).

Just as Dizon (2016) said, the rise of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs and social-networking sites (SNSs) has had a tremendous impact on how we consume information, communicate with others, and go about our daily lives. SNSs in particular seem to have great potential to impact language learning as these technologies have become an integral part of the lives of young people (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Godwin-Jones, 2010).

Recent studies by Jin (2015) and Yen, Hou, and Chang (2015) for instance have illustrated how SNSs can promote L2 skills. Nevertheless, there has been resistance to their incorporation in the classroom, particularly at the tertiary level. Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, and Witty (2010) found that while university students are much more open to the use of Facebook to support classroom work, faculty members are inclined to believe that the site is solely for personal or social purposes. This is in line with others who believe that Web 2.0 technologies may not be suitable in the context of formal L2 teaching (Lohnes & Kinzer, 2007; Waycott, Bennett, Kennedy, Dalgarno, & Gray, 2010). Despite these reservations, there is a need to examine the pedagogical value of SNSs in the context of L2 learning and teaching. In this literature review, five main questions are used to guide the analysis:

- 1) What are the research purposes of language learning based on social media?
- 2) What are the research directions of language learning based on social media?

- 3) What are the theoretical foundations of language learning based on social media?
- 4) How have researchers designed to promote language learning with the help of social media?
- 5) What are the learning outcomes of language learning based on social media?

2. Methodology

In this study the content analysis method was adopted. The collected data were classified according to the coding framework and then presented with frequencies along with detailed descriptions.

In this literature review, four journals, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *System*, *Language Learning & Technology* and *ReCall*, were selected to search for research articles on language learning based on social media. First, research papers were chosen for review by reading the titles, keywords and abstracts of every article in the four journals from 2015 to 2018. After searching, 22 articles related to social media were selected. As a few articles were not so appropriate for language learning based on social media, the 22 articles were re-examined carefully. Finally, five unrelated articles were removed and 17 articles were identified for further analysis.

3. Analysis of Results

3.1 Analysis of research directions

It is often observed that the globalization of social media has opened up new opportunities for informal intercultural communication and foreign language learning.

Social communication should be taken into account because social networking applications (apps) are widely used for communication on mobile phones every day (Khaddage, Muller, & Flintoff, 2016). It has been acknowledged that social media have changed the way of learning a foreign language; however, there are still some issues that researchers need to consider when carrying out experiments.

First, the use of social communication apps on mobile devices which are related to classroom teaching should be developed to match the specific class to reinforce teaching and learning, while integration into the class content should be taken into account in a MALL (Mobile-Assisted Language Learning) context (Zou, Li, & Li, 2018). Second, while communication effectiveness and information exchange are prioritized in the digital era (Warschauer, 2007), an alternative research direction reflecting the affordance of task-based discussions is called for to evaluate blog-mediated activities (Chen, Shih, & Liu, 2015). Third, as Levak and Son (2017) recommended, the selection of tools should be carefully considered in alignment with task aims and the affordances of the online tools.

3.2 Analysis of research purposes

With regard to the research purposes of language learning based on social media, they can be divided into two groups. One is from the teacher's perspective, and the other concerns the students.

As can be seen in Figure 1, most articles based on social media explored student language learning, with only two of 17 addressing teacher learning, which includes transformative learning and integration of language learning and teaching.

In terms of student learning, some practitioners have aimed to explore social media in language acquisition such as listening comprehension (Levak & Son, 2017), pronunciation (Fouz-Gonzalez, 2017; Mompean & Fouz-Gonzalez, 2016), and vocabulary acquisition (Arndt & Woore, 2018). Improving students' writing is the objective of many researchers. Benson (2015), Özdemir (2017) and Jin (2018), who had a similar research purpose, aimed to clarify the relationship between language and culture and the cultural effects on students' language learning in a social networking environment.

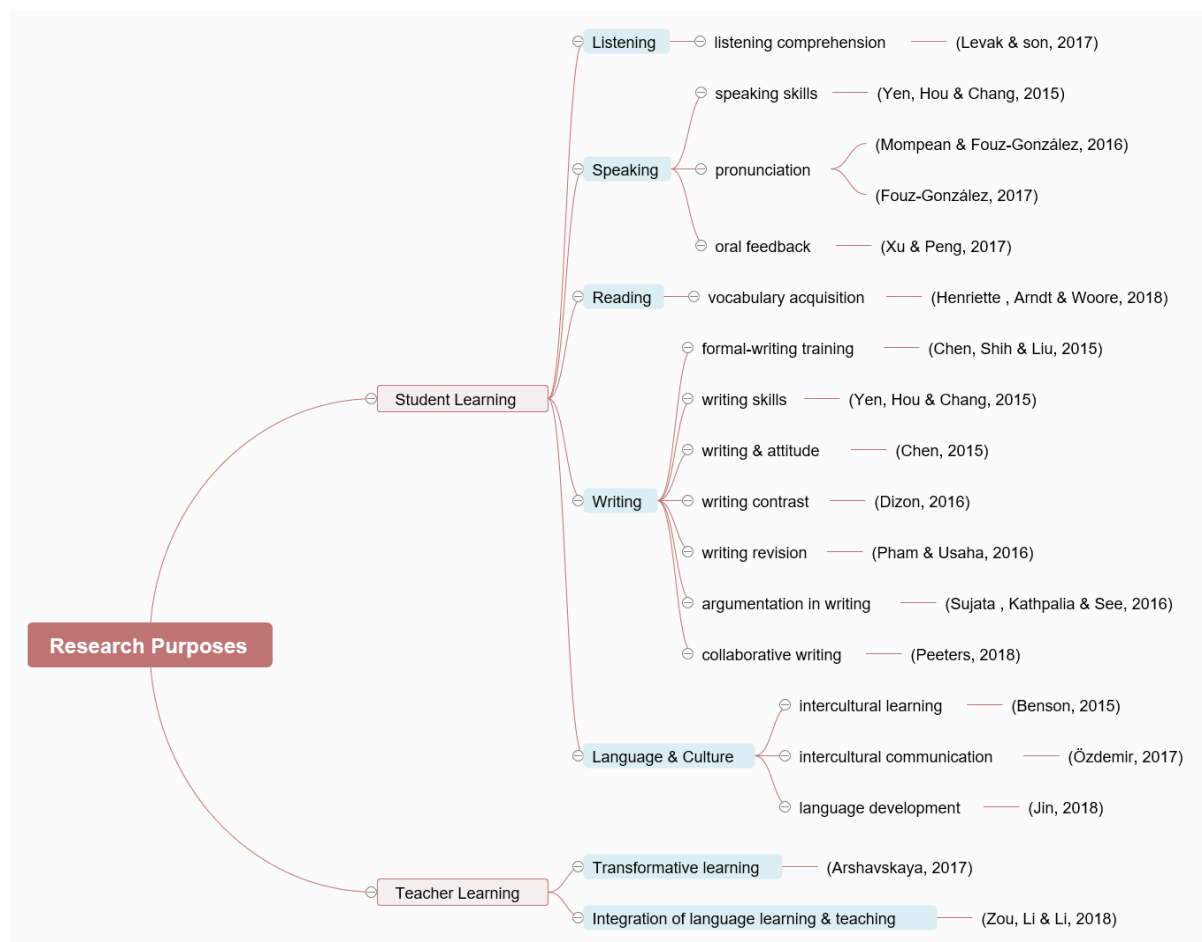


Figure 1. Research purposes of the studies.

3.3 Analysis of the theoretical foundations

Theory is the foundation of research. In the language learning based on social media experiments, various theories are employed to support the main points. In Figure 2, among the 17 articles, nine indicated the theoretical background clearly. Then each theory connects to one or more articles.

Chen (2015) used Specialization codes of legitimation to support his research. Specialization codes of legitimation is one dimension of Maton's Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), which emerged in the late 1990s by building upon Basil Bernstein's (2000) sociological theories, and has been applied across a burgeoning array of social fields and educational practices, including linguistics (Hood, 2011; Matruggio, Maton, & Martin, 2013), educational technology (Chen, Maton, & Bennett, 2011; Howard & Maton, 2011), school courses (Lamont & Maton, 2010; Macken-Horarik, 2011), higher education (Shay, 2011; Wolff & Lockett, 2013), and design studies (Carvalho, Dong, & Maton, 2009). LCT describes education as comprising fields of struggle where actors' beliefs and practices represent competing claims to legitimacy; that is, actors within a field are constantly "striving to attain more of that which defines achievement and to shape what is defined as achievement to match their own practices" (Maton, 2014).

Socio-cultural theory received increasing attention in the collected articles. The ecological and sociocultural perspective in SLA was developed out of sociocultural theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; van Lier, 2004). Through the lens of sociocultural theory, all human activities are mediated by physical and psychological tools such as language and other symbolic signs. Language learning is a significant human activity mediated by various semiotic resources in the environment (Zou, 2018).

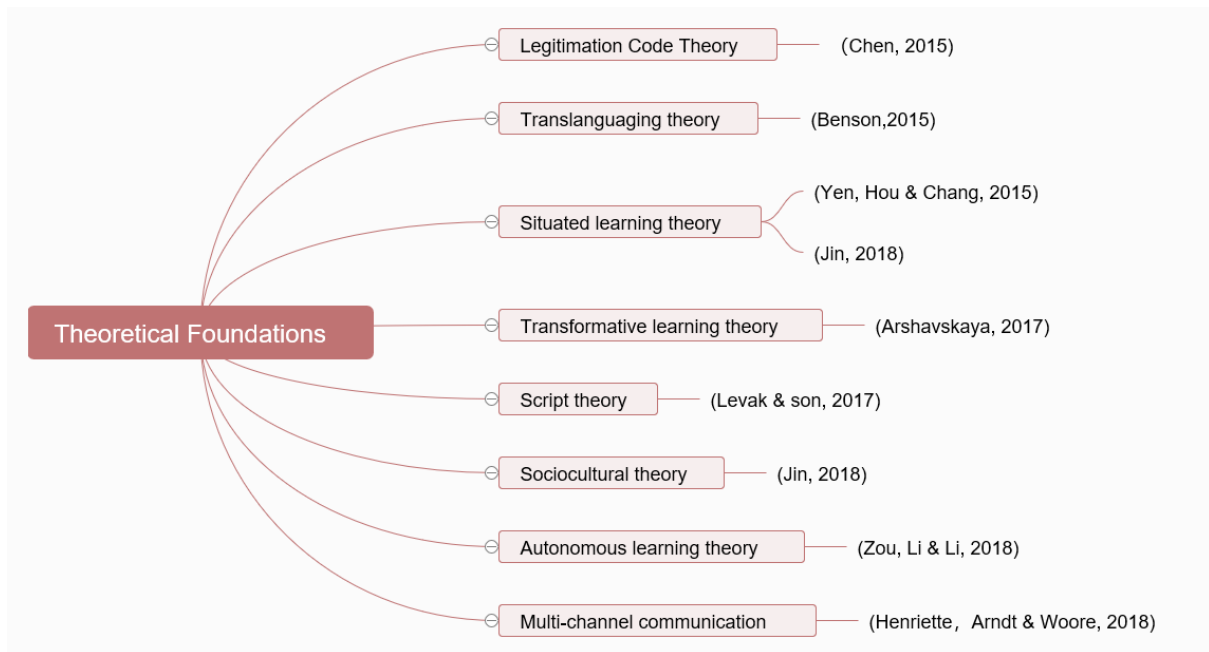


Figure 2. Theoretical foundations of the studies.

3.4 Analysis of the research designs

As shown in Figure 3, the designs of these studies are mainly mixed studies. According to Figure 4, practitioners mostly used blogs to carry out their research, and WeChat was adopted in three of the 17 studies.

As a matter of fact, there are more than 700 million active Chinese social media users on several major Chinese social networking sites (SNSs). Research shows that over 90% of Internet users in China are using SNSs (China Internet Network Information Center, 2016), making SNS use a must in daily life (Jin, 2018). Therefore, more research can be done to explore the relationship between so many Chinese social media users such as WeChat users and their language learning.

In the experiments, college students are the most likely research participants. Figure 5 reveals where the participants come from and which country has conducted the most experiments in language learning based on social media. Taiwan, China published three papers about this topic in 2015. With so many people learning English in China, there should be more experiments exploring social networks and the language learning of Chinese people.

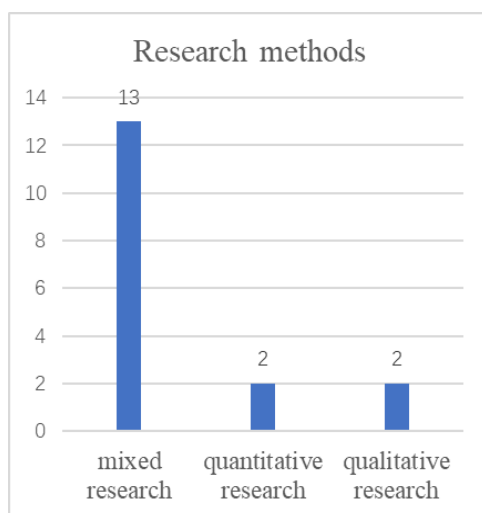


Figure 3. Research methods adopted.

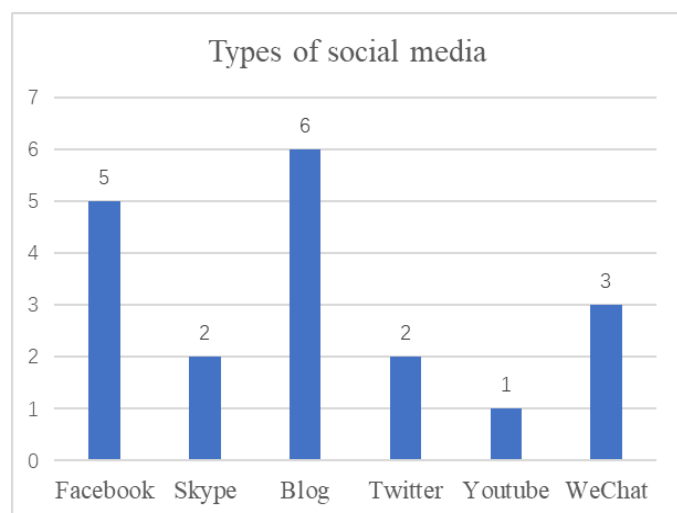


Figure 4. Types of social media adopted.

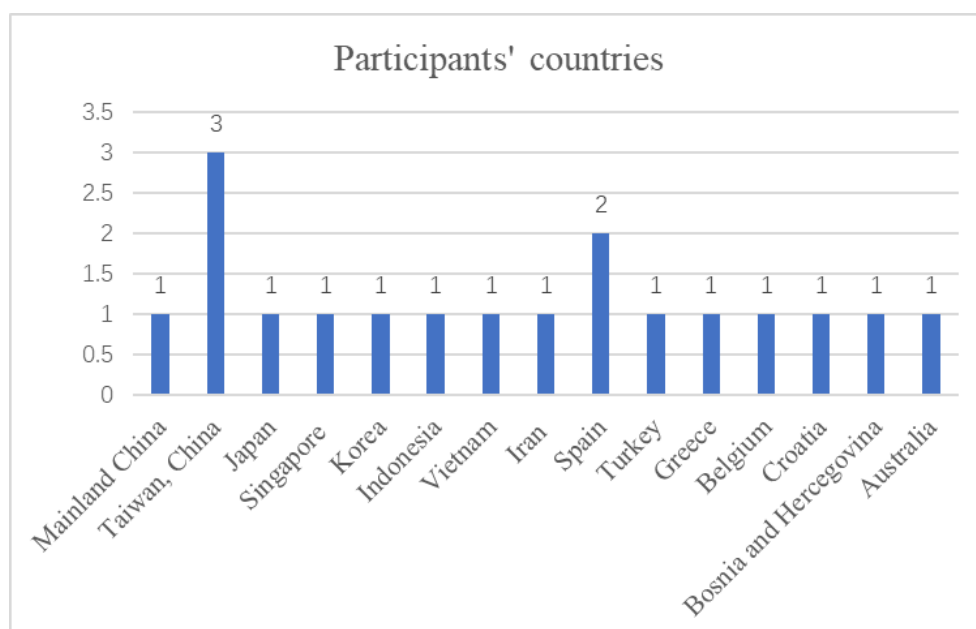


Figure 5. Participants' countries.

3.5 Analysis of learning outcomes

A wealth of experimental studies have been carried out to ascertain the suitability of social media for language learning (Jin, 2018; Arndt & Woore, 2018). The main outcome of the studies signifies the effects of knowledge acquisition (Benson, 2015), motivation (Zou et al., 2018), and intercultural communication (Ozdemir, 2017). Meanwhile, the reviewed studies also reported their research limitations for explaining learning outcomes. For instance, several studies stated the limitations of small sample size (Arndt & Woore, 2018; Zou, Li, & Li, 2018) and the short duration of the teaching experiment (Fouz-Gonzalez, 2017; Xu & Peng, 2017). Internet services are sometimes an issue on campus resulting in slow Internet speed hindering audio-based communication. Besides, it is difficult to assess how much knowledge the students have obtained from social media. In order to improve educational significance of social media for language learning, teachers should integrate their curriculum design, task design with technology use. They should teach the students in accordance with their needs and take full advantage of social media.

4. Conclusion

This study reviewed 17 studies on the application of social media to language learning from 2015 to 2018. From the five aspects of the research directions, research purposes, theoretical foundations, research designs and learning outcomes, a coding and analysis framework was constructed for a systematic literature review. It would be conducive to follow-up studies to use the content analysis method to conduct a systematic literature review of the relevant literature on the application of emerging technology education.

Through this review and analysis, a number of studies were carried out to ascertain the suitability of social media in language learning. More research can be done to explore the relationship between Chinese WeChat users and their language learning. As the grounds for future research, literature reviews have the capacity to engender new ideas and directions for language learning based on social media.

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