

**The targeted use of the informal
register on a social networking
site by foreign-language learners
evaluated through linguistic
analysis and perceived-context
appropriateness**

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Declaration

The thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for another degree at any other institution.

Academic profile of the researcher

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Lisette's mother tongue is Dutch. Lisette left the Netherlands at age 22 for the UK, where she lived for sixteen years. She currently resides in Switzerland. Lisette's interest in language learning, technology and her experiences of social integration informed the research topic of this thesis.

Abstract

In today's society, complex issues relating to socio-cultural integration are a key concern for policy makers, with far-reaching implications for domestic and foreign-language policies. In an increasingly globalized world, English continues to be used by many people from diverse linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, who need to communicate daily. The use of the informal register is crucial for developing successful professional and personal relationships, yet it has not received sufficient attention from foreign-language teachers, researchers and policy makers.

This exploratory study addressed this research gap through the deployment of a multi-layered study, which focussed on the instruction and perception of the informal register. It is the product of a research project spanning almost five years in which it employed a one-group pretest-posttest intervention. In the intervention study, referred to as Stage One, 15 advanced foreign-language learners completed study materials comprising of listening, reading, writing and 'speaking' activities over a period of five weeks. The 'speaking' activities were undertaken using asynchronous chat on the social networking site. In addition to a linguistic assessment of the intervention, a practical evaluation was undertaken in Stage Two by speakers of English who rated Stage One posts based upon their context appropriateness.

The results of the study indicate that students not only used the informal register with more frequency, but utilized a wider variety of register features and furthermore used these with greater appropriateness. Students considered instruction in the informal-register features to be beneficial. Analysis of the findings illustrated that context-perceived appropriateness is linked to

characteristics of English speakers such as personal preference and knowledge of Spanish, and not to the linguistic features identified in the posts. The implications of this study for practice, theory, policy and methodology are extensive; from the need to reassess the effectiveness of traditional e-learning models for interaction to the introduction of new policies which introduce pedagogical-focused teacher training to exploit the affordances associated with the educational use of social media. The study's primary, original contribution to knowledge lies in the fact that it contributes to the debate about the teaching of informal language, by introducing dedicated instruction in the informal register, to adult learners of English, using a social networking site.

Glossary of abbreviations

CALL	Computer Assisted Language Learning
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CMC	Computer Mediated Communication
Eurocall	European Association for Computer-Assisted Language Learning
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FL	Foreign Language
L1	First language, also referred to as a person's native language
L2	Language a person is learning
SNS	Social Networking Site
Social bookmarking	A way for learners to manage web links
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
WE	World Englishes

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the study

The use of language is constantly changing, yet the importance of using 'appropriate' language, for native and foreign-language speakers alike, remains. The way in which the individual uses language impacts upon all aspects of his life, from the building of social relationships, to his work and study; meanwhile, foreign-language education has become increasingly relevant to policy makers globally (Dixon et al., 2012), because of such associated phenomena as immigration and integration. Traditionally, the main aim of the foreign-language learner has been total mastery of a given language, which generally focusses on the accent, but can also relate to grammar, vocabulary and style. Language learners sometimes focus on those accents which enjoy high social prestige. Foreign-language learners then have endeavoured to use the language in similar ways to these native speakers.

Personal and professional experience from the researcher partly informed this research project. The researcher is a Dutch native, who arrived in the UK in 2001 for a professional traineeship. In her experience, her language instruction prepared her very well for work-related communication but not for interacting with colleagues in social settings. The researcher was able to interact with customers at reception at a five-star hotel effectively, as these interactions were taught and practised (role-play) as part of the language instruction provided. However, when attending a party of a colleague, the researcher was not able to follow the conversation, which mainly focussed on topics such as soap operas, fashion and dating. This experience was not unique, the researcher found herself to be able to communicate during working hours, but at a loss for words during break times, when the topics strayed away from work-related vocabulary.

Seven years later, the researcher completed the Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, awarded by Cambridge University and taught ESOL in a range of settings. The researcher also found in her own teaching practice that the focus of ESOL materials (books, curriculum, exams, external websites) focussed mainly on instruction of (formal) language appropriate in the workplace and study. She also recognised that students in class tended to work collaboratively and communicate in the target language, but many reverted to

their own language during the breaks. These experiences were the basis of the initial enquiry which formed the foundation for this study.

In recent years, the great diversity in the use of English around the world has been seen as more acceptable with these linguistic varieties referred to as 'Englishes'. Societal changes have seen a gradual transition in foreign-language education, from at one-time teaching only a standard version of English, to the current situation, whereby a variety of 'Englishes' are used in a given curriculum. This transition is evidenced by the concurrent use of American, Australian and Caribbean English in some second language course books (for example, the Headway series (Volckaert-Legrier, Bernicot and Bert-Erboul, 2009)).

Increased use of the informal register is another societal change (Crystal, 2011). Register, according to Biber and Finegan (1994), is specialised vocabulary related to an occupation, topic or activity, which specifies appropriate formal or informal language use (register types and the features of the informal register are discussed in detail in Chapter 2). The informal register in this study is defined as the language used in interacting in and describing everyday activities and interactions. Carterette and Hubbard Jones (1974) suggest that there is very little information available regarding informal language and, despite increased use of the informal register, only a very limited number of empirical studies focused on informal language use, have been undertaken in a classroom setting over the last forty years (Jones and Carter, 2014). Research on the use of spoken language and corpora has received a lot of attention from applied linguists since 1974, as analyses of corpora have “fundamentally altered the ways in which linguists research and view language” (Rühlemann, 2008b, p672). Also in the EFL field, teaching strategies to develop spoken language have been considered to make these more authentic, for instance in the work of teacher feedback by (Cullen, 2002). Perhaps the most influential study exploring corpora is that carried out by Biber (1995), which included a multi-dimensional analysis of register variation. Despite these developments, the field of EFL has been slow to respond (Rühlemann, 2008a). This might be as the EFL spoken investigations focussed mainly on interactions between non-native (learners) to native speaker (teacher), whilst the majority of the corpora research focussed on interactions between native speakers. Another reason might be that these spoken features are attributed to a particular cultural identity, which might not be relevant to foreign-language learners (Jones and Carter, 2014). Either way, as more

corpus-based studies in EFL emerged recently (Csomay and Prades, 2018; Sibanda and Baxen, 2016), there is a consensus among teachers that learners should be exposed to features typical of spoken language (Timmis, 2012), e.g. the informal register. The inclusion of variety in language use, such as register type, in the curriculum should be the aim of educators, according to Yiakoumetti (2010). This study will address Yiakoumetti's (2010) recommendations by investigating the impact of dedicated instruction of the informal register, in foreign-language education.

Foreign-language learners often have specific motivations for learning another language: to increase their employability, for example, or for family reasons. Clearly, it is important for learners to master the grammatical features and lexis associated with formal language to help them succeed in academic study or employment. It is less evident (to teachers and foreign language learners alike), however that learners also need to be able to use the informal register proficiently, because this too is of importance in an academic career or employment. Indeed, the use of the informal register is crucial to interactions in a range of settings, from social interactions with friends, to 'a chat at the coffee machine' at work. Unsurprisingly, evidence suggests that foreign-language learners do not use the informal register appropriately. For instance, Leedham and Cai (2013) found in their study with Chinese learners, that issues regarding formality were disregarded: as a result, learners misused features of the informal language, including pronouns and linking adverbials. Another example is learners' unawareness of the importance of social distance in the academic setting, which can have serious consequences for academic study and their potential career paths (Harizah and Suhaila, 2013).

The use of the informal register is not only important to avoid 'faux-pas' but is in fact key to social interaction. Indeed: "social interaction is the very bedrock of social life" (Heritage and Clayman, 2010, p7). Social interaction is a complex process, especially when applied to conversations, and the learner needs to be able to make snap decisions as to what language is appropriate. Native English speakers often make these decisions subconsciously, but unless the foreignlanguage learners have learned the vocabulary, level of formality and features of conversation, they are unlikely to use appropriate forms of language, which could hamper their social interaction and affect not only their career but also their social integration (Turner, 2009). It is argued here that knowledge of

register variety is needed for learners to switch between informal and formal English where appropriate.

The arrival of new technologies, such as web-based tools, has created opportunities and challenges in education. An example of such an opportunity is the use of blogging which provides students with authentic learning space to write about their life and experiences in the target language. Online security and user privacy were challenges associated with web-based tools at the time of this study's conception. At the time, and despite being widely used by learners in the home, many web-tools were blocked by educational establishments, which resulted in a research vacuum. The use of the informal register on these sites and their interactive nature made them a suitable tool for language education, fostering global communication and an extensive social context in which to use language (Liang, 2012).

Although informal language is defined by register markers (Biber, 1995), rules for their use is complex. Halliday et al. (1964) suggest that register varies depending upon: the stakeholders involved; the meaning of the language; and the situation in which the conversation unfolds. The interaction in which the language occurs is also of importance, in particular the "the degree of formality, distance of power and socio-psychological distance between speakers" (Natalya and Alina, 2016, p93). Accepted forms of language are continuously changing, and foreignlanguage education should support students in assessing the context for appropriate register use, while encouraging an awareness of ongoing corpusbased changes.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of the informal register within social networking sites when used as part of foreign-language learning, in a conscious and systematic manner. The inclusion of the informal register in teaching materials has implications for task design, which will be discussed in the literature review. Task design for this study is defined as: the creation of classroom-based activities for foreign-language learners to undertake in support of their learning. As such, the overall research question for this project is:

Does dedicated classroom instruction in the use of the informal register, delivered through social networking sites, influence students' communicative interactions as measured through linguistic analysis and the perceptions of a sample of speakers of English?

This overarching research question can be divided into the following subquestions:

1. How did students use the targeted features of the informal language, as measured at the beginning and end of the intervention study?
2. What impact did the study have on students' communicative interactions with their peers?
3. Which factors influenced the ways in which speakers of English perceived the appropriateness of the posts generated during Stage One of the study?

Research into the use of a social networking site for language teaching is both innovative and important. Surprisingly, research to date is limited, despite the pivotal role of language learning for social integration. Notwithstanding widespread acknowledgement of the importance of the social dimensions in education, "there has been little research examining motivations and obstacles to teaching with SNS in higher education" (Akçayır, 2017, p378). Social networking sites are an ideal tool for this study as: "social media are 'social' in that they facilitate the creation and sharing of information, and they have the potential to enhance dialogue and collaboration as well" (Joosten, 2012, p3).

Dedicated instruction of the informal register on social networking sites creates a space for peer-to-peer interaction to practice the informal register. The prominence of the informal register on social networking sites makes them an ideal medium for informal language practice: "The type of interactions that take place on [social networking sites] are conducted via the written mode, and yet at the same time they exhibit much of the interactivity and informality that is often found in speech" (Seargeant, 2014, p161), suggesting that the written format gives students time to practice informal speech. It is argued that the authentic use of language on social networking sites helps facilitate the use of the informal register, whilst the delay between interactions allows students more time to practice.

The study took part in two stages. Dedicated instruction in Stage One took place through a series of tasks, delivered via a social networking site called Ning. In Stage Two of the study, posts produced by participants (further referred to as Stage One participants) were considered by speakers of English (further referred

to as Stage Two participants) based upon context appropriateness. Stage Two participants, both native and non-native speakers, assessed the posts produced by Stage One participants. Furthermore, these assessments were undertaken to confirm whether an increased awareness and application of the informal register, as measured through linguistic analysis, was also perceived by speakers of English. The rationale for these assessments and their detailed use, as well as all other methods of data collection and analysis, are explained in detail in Chapter 5.

1.2 Significance of the study

Despite widespread acknowledgement of the importance of the social dimensions of second-language acquisition, few studies have considered the use of social networking sites by foreign-language learners (Kurata, 2010). This may be because, traditionally, informal language was taught at the elementary stages of language education, with the focus nevertheless trained upon formal rather than informal language. Employing a more formal approach in informal situations is unlikely to cause major issues in terms of understanding, but it could cause a subtle divide, impairing the ability of second language learners to build strong interpersonal relationships in their target language. Furthermore, the limited research on social networking use that is available, focuses primarily on identity, and not on linguistic features.

The notion of register itself has been researched widely, with most studies (Blankenship, 1974; Chafe and Tannen, 1987) focused on either the contrast between two register types (e.g. frozen versus consultative) or, as is the case in this study, on a single register. Most single register studies tend to focus on a specialised kind of language (Biber, 1995), such as the language of law, but the informal register present on social networking sites has not to date received much attention from researchers. Tagg (2015) suggests that the lack of investigation is related to the changeability of online texts. The importance of dedicated instruction of the informal register is not diminished by issues related to changeability and the lack of web-corpus for comparison, even though these had implications for the research design.

This study is innovative as register use is not a standard feature in foreign language classes (Barton and Potts, 2013). It investigates the conscious and

systematic introduction of the informal language into the foreign-language classroom and measures its effect on students' performance via assessment by native and non-native speakers. As Joos (1961) suggests, the casual register occurs during interaction between friends or acquaintances, which is precisely the sort of environment social networking sites tend to foster. To the knowledge of the researcher, no studies to date have investigated the informal register being taught or assessed in a semi-structured manner, using a social networking site whilst being outside of formal education.

This study is timely for two reasons. Firstly, the current exponential growth of social media makes them more relevant now to the classroom, as they are, at the time of writing, a mainstream form of communication. Social networking sites are widely embedded in daily life, particularly in those of certain demographics in the UK (Clark, 2009), and it is important to note that they are now also used professionally - many businesses now have a Facebook page, and these are used more and more by local businesses to communicate directly with their customers: "Facebook is now unarguably 'mainstream', with effectively half the UK population having an account" (Rose, 2014). Secondly, this study is timely as the impact of social networking sites has not yet been fully realised (Sharples et al., 2014), but their use can enhance the effectiveness of the learning experience. Sharples et al. (2014) argue that a networking learning system adds value as it enables peer-to-peer sharing and learning. To sum up, then, social networking sites are still "a subject of hope and fear for language educators" (Barton and Potts, 2013, p816). Chapter 3 expands on these "hopes" by discussing the affordances associated with social networking sites.

Several studies (Newgarden, 2009; Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin, 2010; Wu, Yen and Marek, 2011) have investigated the use of social networking in various classroom situations. These focused primarily upon the relationship between the specific identity of the student, and use of the website. Research into student relationships and community via social media are widely available, and these studies have included second language learning, as well as a range of other topics (Chambers, 2013; Page, 2011): none has used the social networking site to introduce complex language features through direct instruction.

As outlined in the literature review, at the time of the study's conception, many teaching practitioners continued to show a marked reluctance to include the

practice of social networking in the classroom; this, despite the fact that it has become a widely used method of communication, with over 32 million Facebook users in the UK in 2017. It is essential that teachers develop an appreciation of the potential that today's existing and emerging technologies offer, in order to rethink the nature of education and the roles of classrooms, learners and teachers (Kessler, 2013b). Communication methods are taught in the classroom to ensure that students can use a range of different methods to help them acquire a foreign language - among them, social networking sites.

In summary, then, it can be seen that the paucity of academic research in this field makes it difficult to validate the affordances regarding use of social networking sites in foreign-language classrooms. This study endeavours to contribute to this research vacuum, and focuses on the impact of dedicated instruction in enabling students to employ the informal register when using a social networking site.

1.3 Overview of the thesis

The thesis is structured thus: the first chapter presents an introduction to the study and introduces the research questions. The second reviews the use of register and in particular, the use of the informal register in second language teaching. The literature on interaction is also reviewed, highlighting the importance of interactivity upon student outcomes (Joosten, 2012). The third chapter reviews the literature regarding computer-mediated approaches in foreign-language learning and e-learning, and synthesizes the limited research completed to date, on the use of social networking sites. Chapter 4 outlines the context for the study by discussing English instruction in Spain, where Stage One fieldwork was carried out. The research methodology for the project is outlined in Chapter 5, and its application in terms of study design, locations and participant groups is justified in Chapter 6: also discussed in Chapter 5 are the theoretical implications of the chosen data collection and analysis methods, whilst Chapter 6 explains their application. The findings for the study are outlined in Chapter 7, and discussed further in Chapters 8, 9 and 10. The thesis then summarises its main conclusions in Chapter 11, while also highlighting the implications of this study for policy and practice.

1.4 Summary

This introductory chapter has outlined the purpose of the study, which is to investigate dedicated instruction of the informal register for foreign language learners, through use of a social networking site. The study has several key areas of significance which are outlined in the chapter and summarised below. The informal register - by which we mean the use of informal language between friends - has not been widely investigated, and it is thought that this study is the first of its kind, since it consciously and systematically introduces the informal register into the foreign language classroom, and assesses its effect on students' performance via analysis of linguistic features, and the ratings of speakers of English. It is felt that this study is timely, due to the expansion and impact of social networking sites: it is by addressing the research vacuum identified in this chapter, that the study provides a space for foreign-language learners to learn from peer-to-peer interaction. Task design is important for realising the affordances associated with the use of social networking sites. The implications of the study topic, its design and implementation, are extensive, and will be highlighted throughout the thesis.

Chapter 2 Literature review: Stimulating interaction for authentic use of the informal register

2.1 Introduction

The promise of further opportunities is one of the principal motivators for the foreign-language student, and the acquiring of language in this context serves a functional purpose: to connect to people or to enhance career prospects. Informal communication is required to achieve both purposes, and to establish this, learners must be equipped with both the linguistic features of the language and the strategies for interaction, and it is these which are the focus of this literature review.

The United Kingdom's English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) curriculum does not seek to define informal language in the same way as forms of formal

language. An example of this is 'Wt/L2.6' in which students are asked to use different styles of writing for different purposes, e.g. persuasive techniques, supporting evidence, technical vocabulary (Department for Education and Skills, 2000) even though for the last ten years, the need for different discourses to be taught, has been argued by several academics (Yiakoumetti, 2010; Sutherland, 2011; Van Compernelle, 2009). Furthermore, the grammar of spoken conversational English in EFL textbooks is patchy at best (Cullen and Kuo, 2007).

Literature relevant to the current study suggests that dedicated instruction of language variety should not be limited to Englishes but also to register type. Furthermore, it argues that learners should be provided with the opportunity to practice informal language in the classroom, as this lack of instruction is "inadequate for many learners, particularly those for whom the development of oral fluency in informal interactions with native speakers is an important goal." (Cullen and Kuo, 2007, p361). Further studies in language variety could extend to previous work, such as that of Van Compernelle (2009) which explored and analysed sociolinguistic (and other types of) variation. In particular, studies which employ social networking sites could contribute to offering colloquial and informal varieties to enhance the learners' awareness and ability in achieving appropriate communicative competence.

This chapter starts by discussing key indicators of informal language, before it introduces the hybrid nature of social networking language including the implications of 'netspeak' and its impact on register use. Current and innovative pedagogies which take account of the informal language are discussed and their implications for the intervention study.

2.2 Key indicators of informal language

The consensus in the academic literature is that, in more formal types of interaction, modes of speaking are narrowly prescribed, while in more informal types of interactions, this is not the case. Biber and Finegan (1994, p295) state that: "noncasual utterances are clearly restricted for very particular times and places, whereas casual utterances are appropriate across a wider range of social contexts". Even though casual utterances might be appropriate in less restricted circumstances, they are nevertheless deemed inappropriate when used in the wrong circumstance. For instance, formal utterances are clearly out

of place when gossiping during a night out or when watching a football game, while certain casual utterances might not be deemed appropriate at particular times during one work-related social event, but considered absolutely essential at another. Biber and Finegan (1994) state that, whilst proficiency in casual language is acquired by imitation and without any deliberate instruction, foreign language learners may need some kind of training in the use of non-casual utterances. The following sections in the literature review argue otherwise, as foreign-language learners are not exposed to appropriate casual language, and cannot therefore imitate it.

Types of linguistic situation vary according to occasion, action and participants, and this is also referred to as the three Ws: What is taking place; Who is taking part; and What part of the language is epitomized (Halliday, 1978). Register can be further divided into field, tenor and mode, where field refers to the subject discussed; tenor to the level of formality and social relations between the participants; and mode to the medium of transmission (Stubbs, 1986), although these should not be seen as individual classifications, rather as interlinked elements which influence register variety (Hasan, 2014). The key when looking at register from a linguistic perspective, is to analyse what social factors lead to a certain linguistic output: this assists second language educators who wish to include the informal register in their classroom.

The informal register, in comparison to the formal register, uses fewer prescriptive terms, and has a less rigid grammatical structure (Biber, 1995). As these two registers are so different, the question remains: should both not be included in the classroom? This study will recommend that the informal register should be included in the foreign-language classroom because most learners do not simply copy the use of the informal register in social situations. Standard English (SE) is an example of formal register used in second language teaching. Rühlemann (2008a) argues convincingly that modelling Standard English is inappropriate, as oral communication utilises different grammar rules, and is also inappropriate for use in conversation, as it is too closely related to the formal register used in formal writing.

Language variety is composed of three functional areas: (i) register, (ii) genre and (iii) style (Giménez-Moreno, 2011), these areas are not independent as Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964) suggest. Register is “a product of these three dimensions of classification” (Hasan, 2014, p9) as register variation is

influenced by factors which can be contributed to one or more of these areas. Register is referred to as 'diatype' first by Gregory (1967) and later by Stubbs (1986) as they both consider that term to be more specific. However, in recent developments in the field of linguistics, 'register' is the prevailing term (Hasan, 2014) and will therefore be used in this thesis. 'Register variety' refers to changes in language use relating to the use of register. Formality and informality are two concepts which are very helpful when identifying Register Variation (RV) but they are also highly relative and may be misleading when applied to specific settings and discourse types (Giménez-Moreno, 2011). Register markers, which can be described as distinctive indicators of a register, are relatively rare, as certain lexical terms are used across a number of registers. The distribution of these linguistic features, together with the register markers, are of great import in this study as they identify the informal register.

Rather than describing register based upon a number of variables, we can distinguish a number of situations where, generally, a specific variety of language is used. Five social relations can be categorised as: frozen; formal; consultative; casual or intimate, in terms of the formality of the situation (Joos, 1961). These are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Register types adapted from Joos (1961)

Type	Usage	Linguistic features
Frozen	Unchanged language that does not resemble current forms	Wording is the same every time it is spoken
Formal	One way participation	Often includes jargon
Consultative	Two way participation	Back channelling is common
Casual	Used for communication between friends and acquaintances	Ellipsis, slang and interruptions common
Intimate	Used for communication between close partners	Intonation is important and vocabulary is often restricted between partners

The frozen register does not change and is therefore relatively easy for foreign language students to master, as they learn the terminology by heart: an example of this is the use of 'Yours sincerely' in letters. Formal and consultative registers are generally taught in foreign-language classrooms, as students prepare for consultative transactions when they write formal letters or make an appointment with the doctor, for example. The intimate register is not explicitly taught in second language classroom; in a survey undertaken by Cullen and Kuo (2007, p361) of 24 general EFL textbooks published in the United Kingdom it is clear that the "coverage of features of spoken grammar is at best patchy". The authors also found that where spoken grammar was covered, this was presented as optional material, which corresponds to the researcher's own experience as an EFL learner. The main issue in presenting this material as 'optional' is that it gives learners the idea that the use of the informal register is optional, whilst this is not the case, as outlined in Chapter 1. The informal register has a particular linguistic pattern - a lower level of linguistic content (Halliday, 1978), for example, but a higher frequency of ellipses, slang and interruptions (Joos, 1961) – the current lack of instruction in the use of the informal register in EFL is inadequate for many learners (Cullen and Kuo, 2007).

Table 2 shows the features identified by Biber (1995) which were selected for this study. Biber's influential multi-analysis approach is a method of identifying the principal ways in which registers differ from each other (Baker, 2010, p31). These features were chosen as they have the highest frequency rate, and occur predominantly in the informal register. Corpus-based approaches have been shown to have implications for language learning (Walker, 2011). This is the first study to address this issue by combining dedicated instruction of the informal register with delivery via a social networking site.

Yang (2013) suggests that there are limitations in using a corpus-based approach, as this might not address the practical issues faced by learners. Furthermore, linguistic analysis by sentence might not reflect the context, which is often key to its meaning (McCarthy and Hughes, 1998). However, a corpusbased approach could be introduced through dedicated instruction of features of the informal register embedded in authentic language, focussing on discourse, rather than individual sentences, which would ensure that the limitations outlined by Yang (2013) and McCarthy and Hughes (1998) are addressed. As Biber, Gray and Poonpon (2011) suggest, the foreign-language

curriculum needs a corpus-based approach as, at present, it does not prepare learners for using informal language in an appropriate context.

Table 2: Features of casual register

Feature	Examples	(Biber, 1995 Selection from table 6.1 co-occurring linguistic features of English Involved production.)
That deletion	I think (that) I'll go	0.91
Contractions	Won't for will not	0.90

Biber's (1995) research built upon previous studies that identified sixty-seven linguistic features potentially important in English register variation. The most frequently used features as identified by Biber were 'that deletion' and 'contractions'. Omitted letters are also a feature of the informal language used in text messaging and chat rooms (Crystal and McLachlan, 2008), examples include the omissions of consonants such as in 'plsed' or 'msg' but in many cases the abbreviations are well-established, such as 'fwd' or 'mtg'.

2.3 The hybrid nature of social networking language and its distinctiveness from informal spoken language

The abuse of literacy conventions on social media features regularly in the popular press, though concerns surrounding the effect of internet use on literacy are similar to those voiced around the time of the introduction of the printing press, the telephone, and the television (Crystal, 2011). The 'hybrid discursive nature' (Soffer, 2010) of language used on the internet is in part responsible for these concerns. Prior to language being used on the internet, it existed in either written or oral form. The language used on the web - referred to as 'netspeak' or 'web language' - disrupts this separation, as it utilises features of both oral and written communication (Crystal, 2011). Grammatical words are often omitted, but this is not necessarily 'new', as it reflects language used in other forms of communication, such as telegrams (Crystal and McLachlan, 2008). Wei and Wenyu (2014) suggests that a defining feature of Netspeak is that it consists of new words. It is therefore of no surprise that web language has attracted criticism for 'making up terms' and not adhering to the higher standards associated with written language. Most forms of language are either written or

oral, therefore netspeak is different to most register varieties individuals experience. Other features of netspeak include use of emoticons; a delay between a message and its feedback; lack of paralanguage, and a lack of established turn-taking patterns (Lundell, Wherrity and Kjellén Simes, 2009). Abbreviations and acronyms, also referred to as initialisms, are often used on social media platforms (Lundell, McMillion and Shaw, 2012).

Lundell, Wherrity and Kjellén Simes (2009) suggest that 'netspeak' or 'chat language', constitutes a separate register, but linguistic diversity is also present in netspeak. Jacob et al. (2014) found that "Rather than moving towards a single unified "netspeak" dialect, language evolution in computer-mediated communication reproduces existing fault lines", suggesting that the use of language on the web reflects existing cultural and demographic language diversity. Whilst oral and written features define the language used on social media, the proportion of informal versus more formal features, varies with the medium used. For instance, the use of first person personal pronouns is more prevalent in short-messaging services (SMS) compared to spoken and written texts, but the use of short forms and emphatic language is also infrequent (Tagliamonte and Denis, 2008). The way language is used on social media also varies according to the user and their age: "as adults stick to the traditional writing rules concerning for example punctuation and capitalization, while teenagers are more aware of the fact that writing on the Internet does not always require the writer to stick to regular rules" (Lundell, Wherrity and Kjellén Simes (2009, p17).

The researcher considers the term 'netspeak' to be unhelpful in categorising the use of language on the internet, as it suggests that a significant proportion of features associated with oral communication are replicated in netspeak. The increased use of informal language is linked not simply to increased use of the internet; rather, it reflects Sociocultural patterns in British and American society in general (Tagliamonte and Denis, 2008; Biber, 1988).

2.4 Current pedagogies which take account of informal language

Learning to recognise, understand, and use appropriately the sociolinguistic features of discourse, is an important aspect of the foreign-language learner's

communicative competence (Van Compernelle, 2009). Vue et al. (2016, p83) observed a “disconnect between writing behaviors they engaged in on their own (texting, social media, and email) and writings they learned in school”. Chapter 3 provides an overview of foreign-language studies which indicate that register use needs to be taught to foreign-language learners. The chapter concludes that the informal register needs to be taught to help learners communicate appropriately in their target language.

As interaction is needed in informal communication, informal language – or the informal register – is also required. (The term 'register' is defined as the use of a variety of language appropriate for a particular situation (Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens, 1964)), or the context of use (Matthiessen, 2015). In this study, the informal register, viz, the language used between friends, is the focus of the research project. The next section discusses register types in more detail, before outlining the reasons for including linguistic elements of the informal register in the study.

Traditionally, in foreign-language teaching, the focus tends to be on the use of formal register. This is because the role of the teacher, in the short term, is to prepare students for exams and, in the longer term, for life in the workplace, school or university. As the formal register is used in all these situations, this tends to be the main focus of education and thus of the register used. In first language learning, students tend to learn the informal register at home from family and relatives: this is seldom the case in foreign-language learning, as students in a second language classroom tend not to interact with native speakers with any frequency, and thus do not automatically learn the use of informal register.

The terms 'foreign-language learning' and 'language acquisition' are often used interchangeably: they are not, however, precisely synonymous terms, and although there exists an overlap between the two, they need to be considered as separate entities. A consensus exists regarding the five basic principles of foreign-language learning, which are: exposure to input; content-oriented processing; form-oriented processing; output; and acting strategically (Driessen et al., 2008; Cook, 2008; Swain and Suzuki, 2010). These principles were the foundations for developing activities in the foreign-language classroom.

'Exposure to input' can be described as the amount of target language to which students are exposed, which will positively influence the learning of that language. 'Content-oriented processing' follows exposure to input, as it is important that that input be processed by the learner before it can be said to have been 'acquired'. Form-oriented processing describes the acquisition of grammar and language. Language output enhances fluency by enabling learners to make mistakes, which in turn encourages an improved understanding. Finally, 'acting strategically' helps to equip students with strategies to overcome inevitable gaps in their knowledge. These basic five principles underpin communicative or functional language teaching, where the goal is to achieve communicative competence.

These five principles can be used as a framework for task design. The limitations of these broad principles include too great a focus on textbook tasks, which results in a lack of focus on interaction (Driessen et al., 2008). Rather, task design should reflect the importance of interaction as it leads to communicative competence. Indeed, Stern (1987. p261) describes interaction as a condition for effective language learning: "Language and language learning are placed into a social context of interaction, (...) based on the principle that the learner must become a participant in a real-life contact of language use as a condition of effective language learning."

Stern's work suggests that, because social interaction is central to acquisition of language, it is essential to include authentic use of language in the classroom in order to facilitate language learning; this should be a consideration in any future studies involving foreign-language learners. To sum up, then, the five principles identified by Driessen et al. (2008) can be used to form a framework for task design.

2.4.1 Dogme and other Communicative approaches

Communication plays a key role in society and relies upon interaction between the interlocutor and the recipient. Communication which takes place in the classroom is often referred to as 'interaction' which, in the absence of a universally-accepted definition of interaction in the academic literature, is defined in this study as the communication between two or more participants (Cook, 2008).

The way in which learners interact and negotiate socially and linguistically with each other in order to communicate successfully, needs to be considered by foreign-language educators (Lee, 2001). It is important for students to develop communication strategies to help overcome gaps in their second language proficiency, approaches such as dogme, which focuses on the needs of the learners and promotes conversation without access to any books or learning materials (McCabe, 2005). The approaches which focus on improving the ability of foreign-language students to communicate, are all part of the communicative approach, also referred to as CLT (Hosam, 2016). Strategies such as circumlocution, approximation, repetition, word invention, request, self-correction and translation are commonly used for this purpose. Lee (2001) points out that interactions between native and non-native speakers feature different communication strategies than interactions between non-native speakers in the target language. She also argues that relatively little research has been done in this area, particularly on the types of modification devices used by learners during synchronous electronic interaction (e.g. online classes).

Three types of interaction can be identified in online classes: learner-to-instructor, learner-to-content, and learner-to-learner (Moore and Kearsley, 1996). Moore and Kearsley's study found that all these types of interaction promoted learning, and helped in developing collaborative learning experiences, but it is important to note that more recent work by the current study's researcher found that peer interaction in a language setting produced more responses than teacher-to-student interaction (Toetenel, 2011).

In foreign-language classrooms, two types of interaction can be identified: (i) interaction between teacher and student and (ii) peer-to-peer interaction. Interaction between the teacher and students is more common in foreignlanguage classes, which is arguably not authentic: teacher-to-peer interaction involves communication between a native speaker (typically the teacher) and the student, with learners often answering questions from a teacher, or, if they are asked to discuss a topic, tending to stay within the boundaries of the subject. To really learn from interactions, it is suggested that learners need to negotiate meaning from the conversation: this requires learners to overcome difficulties by using communication strategies, as Lee (2001) points out, to learn from the interaction. Meaningful interaction includes straying from the topic and responding to topics outside the initial conversation. Although this

does not often happen between teachers and the student, Mayo (2007 quoted in Cook 2008, p226) found that, when second language students converse in the target language, they negotiate meaning successfully and thus 'scaffold' their own learning. This finding - that peer-to-peer interaction can result in natural conversation, distinct from the less natural interaction between learners and their instructor or teacher - has implications for task design. To stimulate natural conversation, tasks should be structured in such a way as to encourage learners to provide their opinion, and then comment upon the views of their peers. This can be achieved by providing topics which are intrinsically debatable, and of interest to the group of learners in question.

Interaction is of more importance in foreign-language education than in other educational settings, as it enables target language practice. Wen-chi Vivian, Ling Ling and Marek (2011) found a correlation between increased interaction and learning in their study of Taiwanese students interacting in English on social networking sites. Their study demonstrated that learner confidence stemmed from being able to speak and understand English: learners' confidence led to increased enjoyment during interaction, which in turn impacted positively on their motivation. Their findings suggested that a complex correlation exists between interaction and English proficiency, which showed that proficiency does not always impact on interaction, corroborated by a study with a group of foreignlanguage learners in England (Toetenel, 2011). Indeed, the findings of the study indicated that interaction and enjoyment were not related to proficiency. Both studies took place using social networking sites. However, synchronous communication was used by Wen-chi Vivian, Ling and Marek (2011), whereas the focus of Toetenel's (2011) study, was asynchronous communication. The use of synchronous communication allows less time for learners to consider their posts, which creates additional pressure on their ability to make snap decisions: by contrast, the use of asynchronous communication can support low-proficiency learners in authentic interactions.

The link between proficiency and enjoyment was also found in a study by Mikyun and Damarin (2008). Their findings indicated that participants did not feel that their English proficiency was sufficient for them to participate properly in cyberspace, although it is recognised that a lack of confidence may also have played a role in this. The use of asynchronous communication aided students' comfort in expressing their thoughts as, according to the authors (2008, p198), it

enabled them to "take time to monitor the linguistic qualities of their output (writing) by checking with references such as dictionaries or textual materials while writing." These studies demonstrate that the use of asynchronous communication can support language learning and help to prepare students for synchronous discussions. In conclusion, then, asynchronous task design gives students the best possible opportunity to build confidence in interacting with their peers.

2.4.2 Natural grammar

The natural grammar approach is based upon a corpus-based deliverance, similar to the way informal register features were identified earlier in this Chapter. This is different to traditional grammar teaching, which focuses on conveying a particular grammar feature, with the aim of teaching the most important grammatical features throughout the curriculum. Shehadeh (2005, p269) suggests that approaches for traditional grammar teaching have been well-established; which should be "generalizable, bringing to the attention of the learner the rules and regularities of the target language" (Shehadeh, 2005, p269). However, one can argue, as per the 'nature-convention' debate (Joseph, 1995), that these rules have been considered as arbitrary or innate throughout history. Verb conjugations for instance are common in most languages, therefore arguable appropriate to teach as an independent grammar subject. But, as discussed in the previous section, the informal language provides less strict rules and regularities as formal language, therefore a corpus-based approach such as the Natural grammar approach by Thornbury (2004) can provide learners with the most frequently used patterns in English. Thornbury's approach (2004) utilising high-frequency words, showing their patterns of use and associated grammar, which enables learners to focus on particular words. For instance, in informal language learning, if learners want to know how to use the word 'very', set phrases can be presented indicating its uses. This can be combined with a more traditional approach by explaining grammar patterns as appropriate and providing opportunities for practice.

2.4.3 Intercultural approaches

Foreign-language students need to decide what type of language variety is suitable in any given social situation. This can vary from language to language and, unless students are made aware of this, they may base their decisions on their own native language, which may feature a different level of formality in the

same setting. For example, in the Dutch language, at one time different levels of formality were traditionally used for addressing elders, but this is no longer the case in modern speech communities. Students from countries where such practices are still common might make mistakes, particularly when learning English, where no such distinction is made when addressing elders. Another example is addressing a person by their first name in formal emails ('Dear Lisette'). This is common practice in the United Kingdom, but inappropriate in many other countries (including the researcher's own country of origin, the Netherlands). One could argue that this is a language issue, but this is in fact not the case: it is largely a cultural issue. For example, in Dutch, it is common to use formal language in email headers, and this extends to other languages: were a Dutch person to compose an email in English to an English-speaking colleague in the Netherlands, for example, they would continue to use the more formal standard, rather than the informal language favoured in the UK.

The elements of field, tenor and mode together, as well as the adult linguistic system and codes or principles of semiotic organization influence these examples (Halliday, 1978; Hasan, 2014; Natalya and Alina, 2016). As discussed in the previous paragraph, levels of formality are related to these codes or principles of semiotic organization, which can be very different from different speech communities which utilise the same or a similar language.

The influence of context on register has been discussed in the previous chapter. Register and context are closely linked to language and culture, arguably they are inextricably intertwined (Galante, 2014) therefore it is crucial to explore cultural and intercultural dimensions in language learning, particularly in multicultural contexts (Galante, 2014). The intervention study as part of this project took place in a school in Spain. Chapter 4 outlines the different Spanish regions and their associated cultures, and the impact that this is likely to have on foreign-language learning. Intercultural differences also affect the use of language in general, and the use of the informal register in particular. These issues are explored as part of intercultural literacy, defined by Heyward (2002, p10) as: "the competencies, understandings, attitudes, language proficiencies, participation and identities necessary for effective cross-cultural engagement". Intercultural literacy is essential for the development of communicative competence: even so, many language teachers have a greater knowledge of the linguistic aspects than they do the cultural (Galante, 2014). Intercultural literacy

is developed when communication is stimulated between participants from different countries of origin, which in this study would be the communication between the researcher and the Stage One participants who took part in the intervention study.

Diehl and Prins (2008, p102) found that intercultural literacy was developed as an added benefit of the use of called 'Second Life'. 'Second Life' is an online virtual world in which users can create 'avatars' - characters specifically designed to participate in this virtual world. Diehl and Prins (2008a) found that participants' intercultural literacy improved as they communicated with other users in different countries, largely because 'Second Life' allows the use of multiple languages, and cross-cultural encounters are common. These online meetings help users to develop insight into various different cultures and, as a result, these insights change the users' own cultural viewpoints. Diehl and Prins (2008a, p102) described this as an: "awareness of insider cultural perspectives and openness towards other viewpoints." However, not all cross-cultural contact stimulates desire for deeper engagement; as Diehl and Prins (2008b) found, cross-cultural contact can also lead to disagreements and harassment.

Intercultural literacy is important as it supports students' awareness, and their ability to analyse the codes or principles of that particular semiotic organisation. This skill is important as students use this information in their choice of register: as the use of register varies in different cultures, an element of intercultural literacy needs to be taught.

Examples of intercultural literacy could be included in language tasks, which would not only aid understanding of culture differences, but also serve to make participants more aware of their own methods of communication, and how these are perceived by others. Tasks might include examples of English use in different settings, including video stories from visitors to London.

2.4.4 Innovative pedagogies such as flipped classroom

The Institute of Education and the NMC Horizon Project provide yearly editions of the innovative teaching and learning methods employed in different context of teaching and learning. In the 2004 report, a method referred to as 'flipped classroom' was included, which 'flips' the role of the teacher and learner. The content for the lesson is studied by the learner at home, so that the time in the

classroom can be used to interact with the content, where the role of the teacher is that to facilitate. The idea behind flipped classroom was “an attempt to make best use of the learning benefits of online and face-to-face teaching” (Sharples et al., 2014, p15) and has since received much attention, mainly in schools, but also in foreign-language learning. Whilst the intention of the flipped classroom is to increase learner engagement and peer-interaction, there is a risk that teacher use the flipped classroom as an opportunity to extend classroom hours and use the time in the classroom to ensure that all teaching content is delivered (Basal, 2015). Whilst ‘branded’ as an innovative method, in many foreign-language classes, elements of the flipped classroom were certainly present before 2014. For example, it is common practice in foreign-language education to provide homework to learners, which often includes reading texts, completing exercises or watching a video. The subsequent session then starts with a discussion of the tasks completed at home, which certainly bears similarities with the flipped classroom approach.

Approaches such as ‘flipped classroom’ provide more opportunities for engagement, which increases the likeliness of the use of the informal register. However, these approaches do not address the need to include dedicated instruction and practice of the informal register in foreign-language education.

2.4.5 Pragmatics

Pedagogical pragmatics focusses on enabling learners express and interpret meaning (Murray, 2010), therefore it breaks away from traditional foreignlanguage approaches which introduce a form, its function and then ask learners to provide examples. Pragmatics can use inductive and deductive approaches, which include often neglected consideration such as the feelings of the other person and context for the communication. Murray (2010, p301) suggests that pragmatics can provide learners with “the means to analyse and reflect on speech acts they have not been exposed to in their formal learning and which appear in the particular context in which they ultimately find themselves using the language”. This study suggests that although pragmatics is helpful in developing awareness of language features and its collaborative approach is aligned to sociocultural theory as discussed in chapter 3, it does not address the gap in exposure, it merely supports learners in coping with this gap. This study does address this gap in learners’ exposure by teaching and enabling students

to practice informal register use utilising pragmatics and other sociocultural approaches, which does not only add depth and richness to foreign-language learning but it also helps to avoid inappropriate use of language which can have unfortunate to catastrophic consequences (Murray, 2010).

2.5 Summary

This chapter is the first of two which form the literature review, with Chapter 3 focusing on the use of social media in foreign-language learning. This chapter discussed key indicators of informal language. The different register features associated with the informal register were outlined, and the features selected for the intervention study described. It then discussed the hybrid nature of social networking language including the implications of 'netspeak' and its impact on register use. Current and innovative pedagogies which take account of the informal language are discussed, including the importance of intercultural literacy, and their implications for the intervention study.

Chapter 3 Literature review: Embedding social networking sites in foreign- language learning and the implications for task design

3.1 Introduction

Over the last twenty years, teaching methods in education have become increasingly focused on the application of knowledge through collaboration, with peer-to-peer interaction permitting discussion and synthesis of learning (Gunn, 2011; Istifci and Kaya, 2011; Johnson, 2009; Chawinga, 2017). The relationship between sense-making and learning is discursively constructed in social situations (Bannink and van Dam, 2006). This chapter describes how the affordances associated with social networking sites offer further opportunities for collaboration in the classroom. This study is timely, as, at the time of its conception, limited research regarding the use of collaborative approaches in foreign-language learning or the use of social networking sites, had been published: three years later, at the time of rewriting this literature review, policy makers and educators alike see the benefits of social networking sites for collaboration. The European Commission report (European Commision, 2014) on the influence of ICT on language learning, encourages researchers to incorporate social communication as a regular, systemic component in formal or non-formal language learning and teaching practices. Foreign language teachers recognise that social networking sites offer: "unprecedented affordances to research, create, communicate, share and thus learn" (Persico et al., 2016, p146). Even so, interaction on social networking sites used for learning is still not fully understood. A key contributor to this lack of understanding is that, in many reported studies the pedagogic aim is unclear, and findings relating to interaction are therefore difficult to interpret. Provided in this chapter is a synthesis of studies employing social networking sites in language teaching, and this identifies a clear gap in the literature with regard to the application of social networking sites as a tool for instruction.

3.2 Sociocultural theory as a driver for sense-making processes and collaboration in foreign-language learning

Collaboration is central to participation in society and knowledge creation, and it is therefore not surprising that the practice has for many years been perceived as beneficial in the language classroom (Kessler, 2013a). The notion of knowledge creation and participation is central to Sociocultural theory, one of the key theoretical perspectives in language education. Sociocultural theory - which may also be defined as 'social development' - stems from the work of Vygotsky, and suggests that knowledge itself is social and created via interaction (Gutierrez, 2006). The origin of Sociocultural theory stems from the work of Vygotsky, and may also be defined as 'social development'. The benefits associated with collaborative efforts are based upon Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Turuk, 2008). Vygotsky (1978, p87) which is defined as: "The distance between the actual level of development, as determined by independent problem solving, compared to the potential level of development, if guided by adults, or by working in collaboration with more able peers." The benefit of collaboration is attributed to the interaction between peers, whilst solving problems (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's (1978) work is still relevant today, as it demonstrates that peer-to-peer collaboration is most beneficial if guided by more able peers, rather than by a teacher. Its application in the context of using modern technology might be seen, for example, in the use of a social networking site in which peers are encouraged to provide guidance, or to 'comment' on posts provided by their peers.

When applying collaborative conversations to language learning, the aims of conversation in the classroom are broader than merely the dialogue itself (Ellis, 1981). In the foreign-language classroom, verbal communication is used to demonstrate the use of concepts through interaction while also allowing students to practice using the target language. In other words, Sociocultural theory when applied to language learning is mainly concerned with building new knowledge through collaborative conversation (Cook, 2008, p230). This principle is explained by Osa-Melero (2012, p302): "When students work cooperatively, they not only practice oral skills, but also learn to understand and consider others' opinions by arriving at, and then committing to, a general consensus". To sum up, then, it is evident that collaborative approaches are even more beneficial in

the context of foreign-language education as, in addition to sense-making, they also offer the opportunity for language practice.

3.3 The need for pedagogy to support the use of social media

In 2015, social media sites reported 2.3 billion active users world-wide, which equates to 32% of the global population (Smith, 2016). Social media are tools for communication, which are open to all (Sterne, 2010). Terms such as 'social media', 'computer mediated-communication' (CMC) and 'web 2.0 tools' are used interchangeably by most researchers (Chawinga, 2017). CMC is the creation of information using networked systems which facilitate the exchange of these messages (Romiszowski and Mason, 1996). It is an approach through which learners communicate either synchronously or asynchronously via a local or global network (Alvarez-Torres, 2001; Chun, 2000). Communication can take place through sharing video, images, sound, and text for both the presentation and the negotiation of information. CMC refers to the application of social media for educational purposes.

The consensus in the literature is that social media can be used to promote collaborative conversations (Rdouan, Abdellatif El and Raddouane, 2013; Kessler, 2013a; Siemens and Weller, 2011). Whilst social media come with affordances, theoretical standpoints need to be considered when designing learning (Hampel, 2006) in order for these to be realised. Affordances are the opportunities that an object or process makes available to users: pedagogy and task design are key in turning these affordances into reality.

The rise in use of social media, which enables students to collaborate via the internet, has added a new dimension to online learning (Beldarrain, 2006). New ideas, opportunities and tools require a change in pedagogical approach. It is easy to introduce social media in the classroom without making any changes to existing pedagogical practice, and many teachers introduce social media in the classroom without capitalising on their affordances (Whyte and Alexander, 2014). If pedagogical approaches are adjusted, new teaching models need to emerge in order to foster interaction for learning purposes (Beldarrain, 2006). For learners to effectively create, share, and receive, theory-informed learning tasks need to be carefully crafted. Cognitive affordances play an important role in the required change of the thinking process and should be considered in task

design: as a feature that aids, supports, facilitates, or enables thinking and/or knowing about something (Hartson, 2003), they are pivotal in shifting pedagogical intent.. Social media provides different cognitive affordances to traditional classroom teaching, since it aids, supports, and facilitates the construction of peer-to-peer collaboration, learning and feedback. These affordances can only become a reality when employed using a pedagogical framework which supports the opportunities these new tools offer. In summary: it can be seen that social media tools require a new way of teaching, which in turn facilitates a new way of learning; to benefit from such affordances of social media as peer collaboration, pedagogical changes in task design are required.

3.4 Benefits of social media in education

The use of online media for language learning has increased over the last ten years, with the introduction of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and before that, the use of social networking sites. “In many ways MOOCs can be considered as distance learning with added peer support and social networking” (Craig, Brian and Tara, 2014, p295), which is why they were included in the literature review, even though foreign-language learning not been a major player in the MOOC space either (Godwin-Jones, 2014) .

At the conception of this study there was limited evidence on the use and efficacy of these sites in language education. Initial studies covering the use of social media reported their affordances in developing classroom communities and collaboration (Crawford, 2011); more recent studies have concluded that students perceived the use of online learning materials and social media in the classroom as a positive development (Merle and Freberg, 2016; Chawinga, 2017; Toetenel, 2014). Furthermore, the nature of social media encourages informal and social communication which could support language learning (Jones, 2015; Thurairaj et al., 2015) and as a result, their use is expanding.

The next section of this chapter synthesizes all but one of the benefits specified in these studies (flexibility of access is a widely-reported reported benefit of online learning and social media (Sloep et al., 2012) but will not be discussed as it is beyond the scope of this study). With the exception of peer collaboration, the benefits discussed in this chapter are peculiar to foreign-language learning. Foreign-language specific benefits of social media including authentic access to the informal register and more time for the learner to respond compared to a

face-to-face conversation. As many of the social media tools are used in day-to-day society, they deliver a forum for authentic use of language and help learners access functions required in daily life.

3.4.1 Peer collaboration

In one of the first published articles on the use of social networking sites, Kelm (1992) found that shy and less motivated learners played a larger role in the interaction in this environment, than when in a traditional classroom setting; the conclusion being, then, that the use of social networking sites can aid particular groups of learners. Kelm's findings (1992) were replicated in a previous study by Toetenel (2014), where it was found that patterns of interaction changed after the introduction of social networking sites, and that their use led to increased group cohesion.

In terms of peer learning, Lee (2001) found that the use of social media can encourage participation and peer learning in a collective scaffolding environment. Scaffolding provides varied levels of tasks with more or less focused guidance (McGregor, 2007) and makes learning more accessible (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan and Chinn, 2007), suggesting that social media is effective in encouraging peer learning and accessing complex learning materials.

Blattner and Fiori (2009) found that when used to practice the target language, Facebook can help to build communities in the classroom as well as to develop the socio-pragmatic competence of learners. The authors focused on the 'group application' in Facebook in order to foster communication with native speakers. This is corroborated by the work of Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin (2010) whose findings indicate knowledge construction through the use of social networking sites. Kabilan et al. (2010) show how Facebook can facilitate language activities whereby the students communicate both synchronously and asynchronously with either their peers or native speakers, and thus interact with authentic language about a variety of topics. This study also shows that, although a distinction can be made between social networking sites, blogs and asynchronous messages, most social networking sites allow for synchronous and asynchronous communication – and is in fact one of the key features for all of these tools.

Over the last decade, where social networking sites were mainly used to communicate about learning processes, the purpose of social networking sites is now primarily to add a social aspect to online education. Poellhuber and Anderson (2011, p102) saw the use of social media as a method of combatting high drop-out rates on online courses. They found that students held: "diverse views and experiences, but they also show strong and significant age and gender differences in a variety of measures, as well as an important institution effect on the student's interest in collaboration". Task design is crucial here, as social media needs to be implemented to address a particular problem or learning aim in the classroom such as, for instance, to stimulate interaction. A common goal could be an effective reason for collaboration. Once established, the goal for learning tasks should be shared with students (Mikyung and Damarin, 2008).

3.4.2 Acquisition of new lexicon utilising social media

In terms of acquisition of new lexicon, Kabilan et al. (2010) found that 71% of the students who participated, believed that they had learned new words via use of Facebook. Most activities enable second language learners to learn new vocabulary, so this finding in itself is not remarkable. More interesting was the fact that students posted on each other's walls, and used dictionaries to look up vocabulary: not only does this process encourage peer knowledge construction, but it also provides access to authentic material in the classroom. Learners in this and other studies (Mitchell, 2012) actively look up words that others are using and as a result acquiring new lexicon.

3.4.3 Embracing technology to meet the changing needs of learners

For learning and teaching to be effective, the needs of the learners must be considered, in order to ensure that the tool selected will deliver the optimum teaching method for the audience (Bersin, 2004). Some sources in the literature suggest that the audience in education has changed, as those learners now entering primary schools, colleges and even higher education will have grown up with the internet and various types of technology. Prensky (2001) describes young students as 'digital natives' and the rest of the community as 'digital immigrants'. At face value, these descriptions strike a chord, and are relevant for this study, as younger learners seem to engage with new technology far more readily than their older peers or teachers. In a classroom this could mean that adjustments could take place based upon age. Furthermore, the use of the

internet and technology have changed society; with most information available real-time at the touch of the button, it is more important to access and process information, than to have information readily available. Consequently, the demands for learners to play their part in society have also changed. It is no longer sufficient to answer a phone call or write a letter, but learners are likely to be required to engage with Email and social media, including instant messages such as WhatsApp. Prensky (2001) argues that this change has not been actioned in Education, but his view has led to reflection on the curriculum and teaching tools by teachers, researchers and policy makers alike.

When considering the use of technology by young people, the affordances are taught rather than being present at birth, as the term 'native' might suggest. It is acknowledged that Prensky's (2001) work has received a lot of criticism (Thomas, (2011), (Jones, 2012), Brown and Czerniewicz (2011) and Bennet, Maton and Kervin (2008)), which is directed at the labelling of the learner as well as the extent and cause of the change that 'millennials' and 'digital natives' suggest. The terms 'native' and 'immigrant' in the way Prensky (2001) used them, referring to 'immigrants' use of technology as less desirable than that of the 'native'. Prensky's (2001) suggestion that age is an indicator of IT literacy has also been questioned, as a review of the literature by Selwyn (2009) found that this was not the case.

However, studies by Prensky (2001) and later Mason and Rennie (2008) show that students who now enter education now learn differently from learners in the past due to the now-ubiquitous nature of IT and the internet. Mason and Rennie (2008, p8) talk about millennials, but their work has similar implications when they suggest that millennials are learners who: "prefer learning in teams, will seek to engage with problems and enjoy experiential forms of learning". Experience and research in online and distance education suggests that this is not always the case; "discussions can remain superficial, become difficult to navigate, or never develop beyond isolated posts" (Kennedy, Liyanagunawardena and Cuffe, 2015, p1). In any case, the need to adapt learning to the needs of the learner and to reflect changes in society remains. Jones (2012) found that students appreciate learning materials which may be considered 'basic' or 'out of date'. However, for second-language learners 'authenticity' is important and can be achieved by using prevalent communication methods. Therefore, learning should have a relationship with

society, not only in terms of its tools but also in its content and processes for learning. Significant changes in society have been seen place over the last ten years, with, for example the proportion of learners who now use the internet and other new technologies is much higher than in previous generations (Dutton and Helsper, 2007) and content, tools and pedagogy in foreign-language learning should reflect this.

The increase in online communication is consistent with new ways of communication in society and it is generally accepted that the increase of technology in students' lives should be reflected in education. Social Networking sites are now widely used in society and should therefore also be included as method of communication in the classroom. Mikyung and Damarin (2008) suggest that communication is important in the traditional classroom, but crucial in the cyber classroom. This view is especially relevant to foreign language learners as it will help to ensure that the classroom is as much of an authentic reflection of the society in which the language they are learning, is spoken.

3.4.4 Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) with a focus on language education

With the first MOOCs appearing in 2006, many more have followed with a range of platforms such as Coursera, FutureLearn and edX now combining elements of informal and formal learning (Niall, 2016). At inception, the courses were free of charge and offered a wealth of learning opportunities for people around the globe and as such, attracted large numbers of participants (Niall, 2016). Sites such as busuu.com for language learning merged learning content with community in highly effective ways; by, for instance, peer-to-peer learning. Different MOOCs also offer educational experiences, as some may be commenced at any time, while others have fixed start dates. The courses that can be started at any time are often self-paced, in contrast to a set weekly workload. Craig, Brian and Tara (2014, p300) demonstrated “that students can extend their knowledge in as well as developing the strategies and skills to cope with knowledge/language input”. Many MOOCs use a range of media to convey learning materials, these often include videos. The use of subtitles has been shown to have a positive effect in language learning, especially in recognising lexicon (Van Der Zee et al., 2017). The extensive use of video in MOOCs might have led to suggestions that watching videos may be beneficial for foreignlanguage learners: this is in fact not the case, as “for content videos there

is little to no benefit of enabling subtitles, even for students with a low language proficiency and for visually complex videos (Van Der Zee et al., 2017, pp., p26). Online discussion forums are often included on MOOCs, which can provide a rich occurrence of authentic language, as “informal online spaces, which make heavy use of code switching, hybridized forms, slang, specialized vocabulary, and formulaic speech” (Godwin-Jones, 2014, p9).

3.5 Authentic use of the informal register

A degree of psychological closeness is a prerequisite for students to use the informal register, which can be achieved by "using first names in online postings, sharing personal stories and examples, responding quickly, writing in a friendly tone" (Conaway, Easton and Schmidt, 2005, p25). Creating a safe psychological environment for student participation can engage students in initiating the development of their own learning. “When content is provided to students in rich and engaging ways, this can also increase their own digital literacy skills” (Joosten, 2012, p52).

The consensus in the academic literature is that the informal register is often used on social networking sites (Su Long Kio and Negreiros, 2013; Chun, 2000; Tagg, 2015). Traditionally, when informal language is used, it is normally in spoken form, but, crucially, it is employed in written form on social networking sites. Lee (2001, p234) argues that: "online interaction is an entirely new type of discourse – not written or oral, but a combination of both." She explains this by describing 'chat speak' (communication on the internet in a 'chat room' or on social networking site) as something that can be both asynchronous and synchronous in nature, as well as both written and oral, as the user tends to write what they would normally say in oral discourse. The importance of the change in discourse is the implications for use in society. For example, the use of informal letters for correspondence has declined over the last ten years, whilst the use of social media has increased dramatically. The use of informal letters is still part of the foreign language curriculum, albeit one that is no longer commonly used.

The increase of social media for informal communication benefitted learners, in vocabulary learning, confidence and motivation (Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin, 2010). The social chats and casual discussions facilitated on the social media site resulted in vocabulary learning, but also helped to build confidence in language production. The study also reported that students' increased

confidence also helped increase their motivation. As a result of the introduction of social media in Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin's study (2010), students developed a positive attitude towards learning English as a foreign-language and thus students felt that the use of Facebook aided them in learning English.

The method used by students impacts the classification of an activity, suggesting that a 'spade is not always a spade'. Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin (2010) found that students classified writing on social networking sites as a form of communication, in contrast to writing in class, which they considered to be a form of writing. Siebenhaar (2006, p481) established six years earlier that internet chat rooms makes writing 'extra attractive', but he suggests that a lack of writing conventions mean that students disassociate formal writing with entries on these sites. The researcher argues that writing conventions are also required for social media but that the topics covered on a social networking site might be more appealing. The context for writing on a social networking site could be associated with life by students, whilst writing an essay might be associated with their academic career. This suggests that the use of social networking sites enables learners to access an authentic context, which is not usually available to them in a foreign-language class.

3.6 Community tools within society

This chapter has already outlined the need for pedagogy to reflect the changes in technology. These changes in technology are part of a bigger societal change: the use of mobile phones and social media has changed ways of communicating in society (Blattner and Fiori, 2009) and a radically new pedagogic approach is therefore needed to prepare learners to keep pace with these societal changes. Glezou, Grigoriadou and Samarakou (2010, p400) investigated 'the society of knowledge' a concept whereby students are prepared for integration into the information and communication society. They consider that the role of education includes the preparation of students for integration.

Pilgrim and Bledsoe (2011) state that social networking sites continue to grow as powerful resources to keep users updated with various sources of information. Their study described a task where pre-service teachers (trainee teachers that are in employment and complete their educational training whilst teaching) use the sites to research information with the added advantage that Facebook keeps them up to date on new developments in their field. A later study in Taiwan,

found that EFL students enjoyed working within a community and valued the interaction the Social Networking Site facilitated (Hsu, 2013). Coiro and Dobler (2007) confirm that the rationale behind the use of social networks as a tool for learning includes the idea that the Internet is this generation's defining technology for literacy. The authors also state that when information is posted via Facebook feeds, group members may respond and interact with other members just as they would with friends. In light of these findings, the use of Facebook as a social bookmarking site could be beneficial to foreign-language learners, as this type of activity could benefit literacy skills and encourage learners to interact with native speakers in their local community.

There is a sharp disconnect between the way students are taught in school and the way the outside world approaches socialisation, meaning-making, and accomplishment (Klopfer et al., 2009, p3). Whereas conversations in the second language class are designed to be linear, interactions in the outside world often relate to several topics: feedback is provided in the second language classroom when utterances are not clear, whilst in the outside world incorrect language is not highlighted or corrected. Applying Sociocultural methods to language learning addresses this disconnect by encouraging learners to participate in authentic interactions, which in turn help students to practice communication strategies which allow them to identify mistakes themselves. Finally, Klopfer et al. (2009, p23) proffer the opinion that "education not only seeks to mitigate this disconnect in order to make these two 'worlds' more seamless, but of course also to leverage the power of these emerging technologies for instructional gain."

3.7 Challenges that affect incorporation of social media in pedagogy

At the time of conception of this thesis, social networking sites were regularly blocked by IT teams of educational institutions. Security and privacy continue to be the main reason for this (Davis, 2010c) although other considerations may have played a role, as these sites cross the boundaries between the educational and private spheres. For instance, Lomicka and Lord (2009) suggest that teachers who introduce social networking sites in the classroom run the risk that students might be unwilling to participate for privacy reasons. This could potentially lead to a loss of face for the teacher.

At the time of writing the thesis, the use of social networking sites for educational purposes is more widely accepted. Social networking sites are used to share information between different stakeholders, but their use seems to reinforce existing group boundaries as teachers share with teachers, whilst students share with their peers. Anderson suggests that social networking sites has changed the way in which teacher undertake professional development (as cited in Davis, 2010a) as teachers use the sites to share new knowledge and ideas for their lessons. The use of social networking sites by teacher is certainly welcomed, but the researcher's expectation of the use of social networking sites is that they stimulate authentic communication by all participants, rather than reinforcing existing boundaries between groups.

Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin (2010) point out that when computer technologies are used for educational purposes, teachers should be alert to unintended learning outcomes that may have positive or negative impacts on students. Learners need to be protected from negative impacts (such as bullying, and the loss of personal data) as much as possible, and competent task as well as research design will aid in this process. These negative impacts need to be considered in a context of ethicality, for this and any future studies.

Although this chapter has highlighted some of the educational benefits of the use of social networking sites, not all learners favour using these sites in class. Baker and White (2011) undertook a study in schools in Australia in 2011, which found that 69 out of 229 students did not use any social networking sites outside the classroom. The main reasons for not using them included a lack of motivation; availability of time; cyber safety concerns and a dislike of self-presentation (Baker and White, 2011). Other students prefer not to use informal tools for learning (Manca and Ranieri, 2013). These are valid concerns and it is important to be aware of these potential barriers. Some of these concerns would also apply when students are asked to prepare short face-to-face presentations about themselves. Practical solutions can be found to overcome these barriers, just as educators would overcome barriers when introducing any other new tool for teaching, either by discussing the benefits or offering an alternative means of completing the task.

A combination of tools could also be an effective way to engage learners. Klopfer et al. (2009, p12) describe a literature teacher in a small rural high school who found that the use of blogs enabled students with social anxiety disorder to

become much more involved in a social networking site that he had also set up. This is anecdotal evidence, but it suggests that web tools such as blogs could be combined to form a scaffolded pathway to the use of more innovative web tools. Other studies, including that of Clark's (2009), have reported similar findings.

Kabilan et al. (2010) argue that social networking sites should be included in education on the basis that these technologies are already widely embedded in the leisure pursuits of students. It should be noted that not all leisure pursuits have a place within education; just because students enjoy using gaming computers does not mean that these devices have scope to add value to the educational experience. However, where possible, educators should seek to identify tools or activities that students enjoy, and bring them to bear where they can be shown to provide a useful learning experience. This could provide an enjoyable learning experience which can improve learning outcomes through the additional motivation provided on the students' part. It also should be noted that the threshold for learners to engage with activities using social media can be lower (Bernsmann and Croll, 2013) and through their use for education, for instance in looking up businesses in the target language, there may be a positive impact on digital literacy skills as well as improving reading skills.

Good course design, including clear pedagogical aims are needed in order to take advantage of the affordances associated with social networking sites. Lomicka and Lord (2009, p1) suggest that the introduction of a social networking site without clear pedagogical aims could result in the: "creation of online dialogues with other learners, purely for the benefit of the teacher".

However, good course design is also crucial in order to ensure that all students benefit from these opportunities. Bettinger and Loeb (2017) found in their study utilising data for 750 blended courses, that 'top' students coped and learned well, with grades comparable to those secured via face-to-face tuition, but that lowerperforming students were more likely to drop out and/or achieve lower grades, both at the time and in future modules. The authors suggest that improvement of the content and pedagogy instruction can improve the quality of these courses.

3.8 Selecting an appropriate social media tool for instruction of the informal register

The previous sections have outlined the benefits and challenges associated with embedding social networking sites: this section provides an overview of the three most common types of social media. The boundaries between these three types are fluid, as the defining characteristics are often combined. For instance, most blogs now have a 'comment' function, which is an opportunity to provide an asynchronous response to the writer.

3.8.1 Social networking sites

Social networking sites are more commonly referred to as 'social media', where 'media' is the umbrella term for tools in which users are able to share information with others: "and enhance relationships by exchanging personal and professional information" (Joosten, 2012, p15). Initially the information shared on social media was text-based, but in recent years it has become more media-rich with pictures, videos and audio files frequently exchanged. Although synchronous communication is possible using a social networking site, asynchronous communication is used most commonly.

The defining characteristic of social networking sites is their purpose of sharing information between groups. These updates are called 'profile updates'. Profile updates, or information that provides meaning for users, could relate to any subject – professional, educational, or personal. boyd and Ellison (2007) define social networking sites as websites which allow users to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system. These users then construct a list of other users with whom they share a connection. They can then view and traverse their list of connections – and connections made by others – within the system. Social networks come in a variety of forms and are shaped by their intended purpose and target audience. An overview of different types of social networking sites is provided in Appendix II.

3.8.2 Blogs

One example of a popular use of technology in language learning is the use of blogs. Blogs are personal pieces of writing that are published on the internet and available to view (usually free) by the public: "Blogs and wikis are genres of texts defined not so much by their form or content as by the kinds of uses to which they are put, and the ways these uses construct social identities and

communities." (Myers, 2010, p15). Whilst Myers (2010) gives the impression that linguistic form does not define blogs or wikis, he suggests that use of an academic voice on blogs might not be appropriate. This suggests that blogs typically employ an informal or reflective register depending on the information to be conveyed (Burnett, 2006; Chawinga, 2017).

The use of blogs has been researched more widely in a literacy setting than some of the other web tools discussed in this chapter. No reasons are identified in the literature for this disparity, but the use of blogs is not dissimilar from writing a story or an essay – the teaching method is effectively the same, although Trajtemberg and Yiakoumetti (2011, p437) demonstrated that the use of blogs can “promote EFL interaction, self-expression, self-evaluation, and a sense of language progress” when used in a collaborative manner. It can therefore be concluded that the impact of the use of blogs for interaction depends on the pedagogical intent set in the task design.

3.8.3 Asynchronous text chat tools

Asynchronous text chat tools, such as MSN Messenger, are examples of textbased tools. Alvarez-Torres (2001) suggests that by using asynchronous text chat, learners can reflect better on their discourse and use more coordinated utterances. Furthermore, Conaway, Easton and Schmidt (2005) report that Heckman and Annabi (2006) noted that online discussions actually increase synergy and the pooling of information, because students have more time to read and reread messages. This increases reflection time and improves their responses in line with Alvarez-Torres’ (2001) findings. In addition, Lee (2001) notes that the majority of research in this area has found that the use of synchronous online discussion in general enhances second language learning. Jackson (2011) supports this view, concluding that certain features of face-to-face conversation also feature in the use of CMC, although not widely studied (Prichard, 2013). It could be argued that online chat tools such as MSN Messenger and ICQ have been integrated in social networking sites.

3.9 Task design for use on a social networking site

In education, task design has been researched and evaluated for face-to-face learning: “Tasks are seen as devices that provide learners with the data they need for learning; the design of a task is seen as potentially determining the kind of language use and opportunities for learning that arise” (Ellis, 2000, p193).

There is no consensus on the definition of task design according to the literature. Bachman and Palmer (1996, p44) define a task as: an "activity that involves individuals in using language to achieve a particular goal or objective in a particular situation." Tavakoli and Foster (2008, p39), however, consider this definition too narrow and conclude, quite correctly, that not all language interactions require a particular goal or objective. They summarise tasks as: "anything that classroom language learners do when focusing their attention primarily on what they want to say to others or what others are trying to say to them." This definition only accounts for oral communication, which is too narrow for the purposes of this study. Another, broader definition is therefore required.

Tasks can be thought of as any activity that second language learners undertake as a direct result of classroom instruction, and which are designed to develop their language learning. Task design for the purposes of this project is therefore defined as: the creation of activities for second language learners to undertake through classroom instruction, and which are designed to develop their language learning.

As stated previously, online task design cannot simply be replicated from previous designs. Online tasks are available on the intranet, students would access these online and work with an electronic, rather than a paper-based copy. This change in technology has brought about a change in educational theory, which should be integrated into a new model for task design. The difference between an electronic and paper-based copy is limited, but the way in which students access the information is very different. Paper-based tasks are normally provided in class, whilst electronic tasks are collected by learners themselves, effectively moving from a 'push' of information to a 'pull'. This process brings on a renewed search for appropriate task design, rather than using the current established tasks for face-to-face tuition. Lafford (2009, p687) notes that tools need to be researched for practicing and assessing various language competencies in second language learning. She poses the question: "Which authoring tools are best suited for creating applications that will help learners practice and assess which specific types of L2 competencies (e.g., pronunciation, lexical knowledge, grammar, pragmatics, cultural knowledge)?" If the aim is to develop and practice the use of informal communication, then the tool must be chosen which is best suited for that purpose.

Hampel (2006) states that task design needs to be researched and developed, rather than for it to replicate tasks used in a face-to-face classroom environment. She describes a three-level approach as displayed in Table 3 for task development, based upon Richards and Rogers (2001), that splits task design into three distinct stages: approach, design and procedure.

Table 3: Three-level design and implementation process for online tasks (adapted from Hampel 2006, p108)

Stage	Implementation
Approach	Foreign-language learning approaches Sociocultural principles Affordances of online environment
Design	Function of tasks within course Syllabus Type of tasks Learner / teacher roles
Procedure	Implementation in the classroom

The first stage in Hampel's design revisits the theories relating to language and foreign-language learning and identifies the most relevant ones for the learning activity. The theoretical foundation then informs the next stage of design, where the roles of the learners and the teacher are considered to design the type of tasks based upon the syllabus. Implementation in the classroom represents the final stage. This three-stage development approach ensures that the task design is based upon relevant educational theories. Although, academically speaking, traditional task design works on the same basis, in practice assessment guides the syllabus (that which students need to be able to do in order to pass the exam), which in turn has a bearing on task design.

Beldarrain (2006) quotes Chickering and Ehrmann's (1996) seven principles of how emerging technologies can be integrated in tasks design. These are:

- (1) Encourage contact between students and faculty
- (2) Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students

- (3) Use active learning techniques
- (4) Give prompt feedback
- (5) Emphasize time on task
- (6) Communicate high expectations
- (7) Respect diverse talents and ways of learning

Although these principles were initially designed for undergraduate education, it has been amended many times since its conception in the eighties. For instance, encouraging contact between student and faculty plays a key role at the time of writing (2016), whilst at the time this model was conceived (2013), large population lectures were common-place and did not allow for contact between academics and individual students. These seven principles are an important foundation for integrating emerging technologies. Beldarrain (2006) suggests that the use of this model could avoid important pitfalls when creating online content. One of the implications of designing online content is that the response by learners to the materials provided could be quite different to that intended by the educator.

Moore (1972) (as cited in Jung, 2001) identified three elements to distance learning: dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy, and these also feature in social networking. 'Dialogue' refers to the extent to which the learner and teacher can communicate with each other, and the definition could be widened to include communication between learners their peers: as long as the communication is related to the learning subject, peer-to-peer learning could occur. 'Structure' represents the relationship between the software and the learner's needs, whilst 'autonomy' relates to the decisions that learners can make to construct their own learning. In the use of social networking sites, there is communication between learner and teacher, but learner-to-learner communication must be encouraged and facilitated.

A theoretical framework that displays pedagogical features of web-based instruction, based upon recent studies in the field, is shown in Figure 1 (Jung, 2001). This figure shows the basis of the web-based instruction element of learner autonomy. Collaboration and interaction are included in the task design.

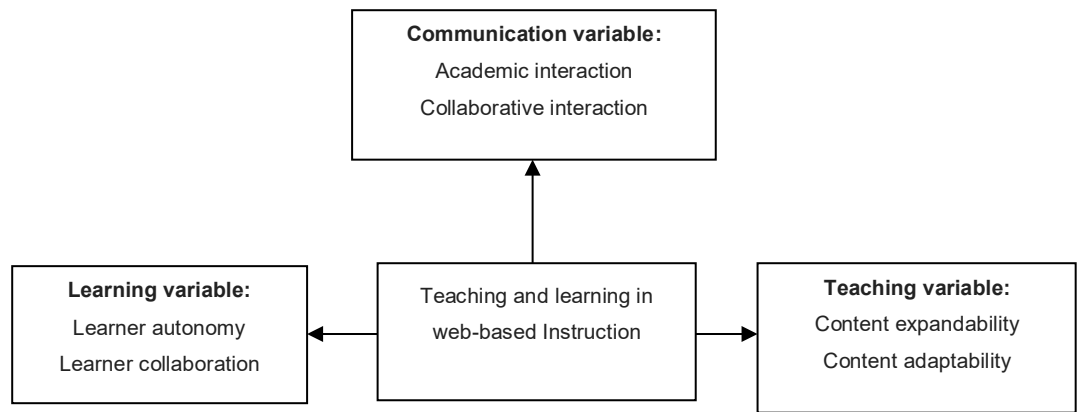


Figure 1: Theoretical framework for pedagogical features of web-based instruction, (adapted from Jung 2001, p529)

The teaching variables in Figure 1 are based upon the content of the curriculum and, with this being displayed on screen, the layout is visual (although this seems fairly self-evident, it could be that Jung foresees future developments in web tools that usher-in the use of virtual realities that can engage all senses). The content is expandable, as learners can direct their own learning further than the direction provided by the teacher, and is also adaptable and flexible by virtue of the continual updating of online content.

The communication variable is split into the three elements: academic, collaborative and interpersonal. Jung (2001) states that when socially-oriented factors are examined in web-based learning environments, they are much more important than in the classroom environment. This may be because, in online environments, the learner needs to negotiate these on their own, whilst in a classroom environment the teacher can negotiate them.

The learning variable includes both learner autonomy and collaboration. Autonomy in learning can be defined as learners being able to command their own learning. Definitions in the literature include descriptors like 'taking charge', or refer to behavioural and psychological patterns (Gunn, 2011). Collaboration can essentially be defined as 'working together', and Istifci and Kaya (2011) suggests that this can occur through the use of web tools when students work with their peers or teacher. Generally, asynchronous communication is used for this type of collaboration (unless all parties are present and working on the same topic at the same time), whilst autonomy is the by-product of web-based instruction, because the learner decides what material to study.

All the variables in Figure 1 feature in the use of social networking sites. Much of Jung's work (2001) is applicable for studies intended to use social networking sites, therefore it is important to consider the research gaps that Jung's work (2001) has identified. These are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Salmon (2004, p29) described a five-stage model that could be used in online education and training. This model outlines the various stages that students must work through before they can access the 'learning'. The model is sequential and has five stages: (i) access and motivation, (ii) online socialisation, (iii) information exchange, (iv) knowledge construction and finally (v) development. Support for the learner reduces over time from providing technical support to e-moderating, an activity in which the teacher moderates interactions where necessary. At conception of the study, this model was the most prominent model for e-learning (Thorpe, 2002). Since the analysis of the findings of this study, Salmon's (2004) model has been challenged (Moule, 2016), mainly due to its focus on a constructivist approach to learning as discussed further in Chapter 9.

To sum up, the previous sections discussed the need for dedicated instruction, whilst this section focused on the importance of tasks design for learning materials. The next section will focus on the need to evaluate learning materials by using a learning design analysis.

3.10 Evaluating task design through Learning Design analysis

Following the intervention study reported in this study, the Open University (OU) in 2015 introduced a refined method for retrospectively analysing and coding learning materials, which was utilised for purposes of evaluation. Similar approaches were under development in 2015 (Kennedy et al., 2015), but the OU's workload tool was at the time routinely used to highlight issues in course design, and other models had not yet been implemented. The tool was developed as a result of research from the Open University, undertaken by the present study's author in collaboration with a colleague (Toetenel and Rienties, 2016b; Cross et al., 2012) which showed that the final versions of learning materials often differ in terms of the balance of activities from those stated in the original design.

Conole (2012, p121) describes learning design as: 'a methodology for enabling teachers/designers to make more informed decisions in how they go about designing learning activities and interventions, which is pedagogically informed and makes effective use of appropriate resources and technologies'. Through the use of the OU's Learning Design methodology, educators can visualise the pedagogical decisions they make through an activity planner. To create this activity planner, learning activity is categorised according to the learning design taxonomy as developed by Conole (2012, p121) as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Learning design taxonomy (adapted from Toetenel and Rienties, 2016a)

	Assimilative	Finding and handling information	Communication	Productive	Experiential	Interactive/Adaptive	Assessment
Type of activity	Attending to information	Searching for and handling of information	Discussing learning materials	Actively constructing a product	Applying learning in a real-world setting	Applying learning in a simulated setting	All forms of assessment
Examples of activity	Read, Watch, Listen, Think about, Access, Observe, Review, Study	List, Analyse, Collate, Plot, Find, Discover, Access, Use, Gather, Order, Classify, Select, Assess, Manipulate	Communicate, Debate, Discuss, Argue, Share, Report, Collaborate, Present, Describe, Question	Create, Build, Make, Design, Construct, Contribute, Complete, Produce, Write, Draw, Refine, Compose, Synthesise, Remix	Practice, Apply, Mimic, Experience, Explore, Investigate, Perform, Engage	Explore, Experiment, Trial, Improve, Model, Simulate	Write, Present, Report, Demonstrate, Critique

The balance of learning activities is crucial as these directly affect student behaviour on virtual learning environments (Rienties, Toetenel and Bryan, 2015).

As part of the task design, a profile or 'blueprint' is produced using the learning design taxonomy, which consists of these seven different learning activities. This teaching plan was captured in an 'activity planner', sometimes referred to as a 'pedagogy planner' which supports the development, analysis and sharing of learning designs (Diego et al., 2008).

Once the course materials are available, the actual design can be reviewed. This is completed by categorising each task as part of the design, which is verified by calculating the time to complete these activities through the use of institutionwide conventions that include estimated reading speed and the estimated amount of

time that students watch video clips (Toeteneel and Rienties, 2016c). Once the estimated time is established, the Learning Design specialist breaks these activities down further, by using the taxonomy of activities. All the activities that take place in a week are analysed in this way and then entered into the activity planner so that the original and actual activity planner can be compared. This retrospective analysis was not available at the time of the task design, but was helpful after the fact to verify the pedagogical intent of tasks in the learning materials used in the Stage One intervention of this study.

3.11 Research gap

This chapter has demonstrated that language learning can be effective when provided online, on either a BOC or MOOC; or social networking sites. Most studies to date focussed on the development of individual skills, whilst Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin (2010) suggest that future research on the use of social networking sites, should examine learners' interaction and engagement with others in various pre-planned and pre-determined language tasks, with specific objectives within the community. They further suggest that students' language improvements must also be measurable by an accepted standard. The suggestions for further research highlighted in this section are addressed in this research project, through pre- and post-assessment of the learning materials provided in the intervention study. Furthermore, Blattner and Fiori (2009, p25) add that: "Rigorous and systematic research into online learning is needed to enlighten educators as to how to best integrate and utilize tools and applications from Facebook in language curriculum". The research gap identified by this study is the need to undertake research which utilises suitable tools from social networking sites to develop learners' interaction and engagement in order to develop a particular language objective. Chapter two identified the need for the informal register to be taught at advanced stages of language learning: for, whilst the literature available suggests that the register choice in native speakers is made instinctively, the premise of this study is that this is not the case for English speakers of other languages. This research gap is addressed in this study by integrated employment of a social networking site to introduce, teach and facilitate practice in the use of informal-register features to advanced foreignlanguage learners.

3.12 Research questions

By stressing the importance of the alignment of task design informed by theory such as Sociocultural theory, this study addresses the research gaps identified in the previous section. The overall research question for this project is:

Does dedicated classroom instruction in the use of the informal register, delivered through social networking sites, influence students' communicative interactions as measured through linguistic analysis and the perceptions of a sample of speakers of English?

This overarching research question can be divided into the following subquestions, the findings for which are reported in chapter 7:

1. How did students use the targeted features of the informal language, as measured at the beginning and end of the intervention study?
2. What impact did the study have on students' communicative interactions with their peers?
3. Which factors influenced the ways in which speakers of English perceived the appropriateness of the posts generated during Stage One of the study?

3.13 Summary

This chapter explored Sociocultural theory, which informed the task design and learning materials for the intervention study. The affordances and anticipated benefits of the use of social networking sites as a medium of instruction, are identified in the academic studies outlined. Because informal register-use depends on the authentic use of language, the efficacy of various web tools were considered, by identifying the advantages and challenges associated with their use. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction to the notion of Learning Design and how this evaluates task design in a more finely-grained manner. As explained in this chapter, this retrospective analysis was not available at the time of the task design, but it verified the pedagogical intent of tasks in the learning materials used in the Stage One intervention and identified areas to be explored further. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research gaps discussed, and the research questions which aim to address such lacunae.

Chapter 4: Context for the study

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the context for the intervention study which took place in Spain, and starts with an overview of the country's linguistic landscape. It then considers the use of English in Spain, including past and current policy for English-language instruction, and describes the role of technology in education: specifically, the use of social media. It then discusses the implications of Spanish education policies, its sociolinguistic and technological landscape, for the study and its findings.

4.2 The Spanish linguistic landscape

In addition to Spanish, four minority languages enjoy official status in Spain: Catalan, Valencian, Basque and Galician (Vassiliou and Šemeta, 2012). These are spoken predominantly in their corresponding autonomous communities (Vassiliou and Šemeta, 2012).

Educational policy has undergone many changes in Spain, and these have been of particular relevance in the sphere of language teaching. Although Catalan, Valencian, Basque and Galician were taught up to 1940, they were excluded from the curriculum during Franco's time in power (1940-1975), with Spanish the only language countenanced for use in education (Clots-Figueras and Masella, 2013; Muñoz, 2005). After Franco's regime came to an end, the status of the Spanish language changed, with minority languages reintroduced for use in official communications, and in everyday life. Spain underwent a transition of political power, moving from a central to a decentralised system where regions of autonomous communities were able to make political decisions (Clots-Figueras and Masella, 2013). As a consequence, other languages could be taught in addition to Spanish, although it was not until 1983 that the education system introduced instruction in mother tongues, thus bringing bilingualism to many regions of Spain.

This change in policy was significant, as bilingualism is proven to develop phonological awareness and thus improve literacy through improved problem solving and judgement (Li, 2003). Sullivan et al. (2014) suggest that the improvement in literacy is the result of bilingual individuals simultaneously

managing two languages, and rapidly selecting the appropriate language as needed, while Bogulski et al. (2015) posit that bilinguals display more accurate performances during working memory tasks, than do monolinguals. Poarch and Bialystok (2015, p113)) state that because: "Both languages of bilinguals are constantly active, bilinguals need to manage attention to the target language and avoid interference from the non-target language", which means that their ability to manage attention is better when compared to that of monolinguals.

Valladolid, the city in Spain where this study was carried out, is located in one of Spain's autonomous communities, but does not have any official languages other than Spanish; this preserves the validity of the study when reproduced in other European countries. Even so, it is important to highlight the impact of bilingualism, as participants could have been educated elsewhere previously. In addition, educational policies in Valladolid could impact upon attitudes towards bilingualism and language learning by proxy. Bilingual education has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on vocabulary development and processing skills, even in a child as young as three (Hurtado et al., 2014). The participants who undertook the intervention study were all known to be to some extent bilingual, as they spoke Spanish and were learning English, but some of them may in fact have been multilingual as a result of Spanish educational policy. It must therefore be assumed that some of the advantages associated with bilingualism might have impacted on the results of the intervention study.

Migration in Spain is another social demographic change which has impacted on language learning. After it acceded to the EU in 1986, Spain received over two million migrants, mainly from Romania, the UK, Germany, Italy and Bulgaria (Pérez-Milans and Patiño-Santos, 2014). This change led to a narrowing of views on linguistic/cultural homogeneity (Pérez-Milans and Patiño-Santos, 2014): perhaps unsurprisingly, the increase in immigration and the consequent emergence of other linguistic and cultural practices, provoked a revival of the Spanish identity, and a renewed interest in the establishing of Spanish linguistic and cultural traditions. Some might have expected the then recently-introduced multilingual system to be further extended to include these immigrant languages, but this did not transpire: in fact, the opposite was true – the country saw a return to a more restrictive curriculum in which Spanish took centre stage. Pérez-Milans and Patiño-Santos (2014, p449) state: "Where language education has traditionally been oriented towards a 'foreign-language teaching' approach

focused on English, French or German, this shift has been followed by a strong trend towards teaching English as the almost exclusive foreign-language in the curriculum". This change in the approach to the teaching of English and the trend towards reviving Spanish heritage is significant and widely reported (ClotsFigueras and Masella, 2013).

4.2.1 The use of English in Spain

A further result of the changes in language teaching as part of the Spanish educational policy, has been the increased presence of English as an international language (Muñoz, 2005) The uptake of English instruction in Spain, in terms of the proportion of school children learning Spanish, increased dramatically, from 5% to over 90% in the last sixty years (Luján-García, 2012). However, it must be noted that this increase bears no relationship to the overall usage of English in Spanish society. The main motivations for students to learn English in Spain are, in order of importance: employment prospects; future education; and personal life (Luján-García, 2012). These findings are roughly commensurate with the rest of Europe, with the exception of neighbouring Portugal and Malta, where students consider English much more important for development of their personal life. In Malta, 82% of students state that a reason for learning English is related to their personal life (Vassiliou and Šemeta, 2012), which might be traced to the cultural heritage of Malta as a former British colony. This indicates that in Malta and Portugal, English is used for wider purposes than just work and education, suggesting a greater prominence in the linguistic landscape compared to Spain, as is evident in Table 5. The difference in use of English in Malta and Portugal in comparison to Spain is outlined to demonstrate the impact of factors such as cultural heritage and personal relations to motivation in language learning.

Table 5: Reasons for students to learn a second language, adapted from (Vassiliou and Šemeta, 2012)

Reasons for studying English	European Union (%)	Spain (%)	Malta (%)	Portugal (%)
Personal life	50.4	51.0	81.8	72.6
Future education	87.7	90.8	93.6	94.9
Future work	81.9	89.8	75.7	94.4
Getting a good job	90.2	96.8	96.0	97.1

Chapter 1 discussed that the language used from a young age, is referred to as their 'first language' which is most commonly spoken in the home. In countries where more official languages exist, the language used for instance by the government, can be referred to as a second language. For instance, English is a second language in countries such as India and Nigeria, as it is often used at school or as a common language between groups of people. Although the population of countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark speak English very well, it is not an official second language: importantly, it is not only not an official second language in Spain, but, in contrast to the Netherlands and Denmark, is also not widely spoken in the country.

Only around half of Spanish students consider English to be important for developing their personal life, which suggests that it is not spoken widely in the students' day-to-day social life (García, 2009). Despite that, English remains the most taught and learned foreign-language in Spain (Muñoz, 2005); (García, 2009), it continues to be a language practised as part of formal instruction. In effect, English is not widely spoken in daily life and limited mostly to the classroom. This is because students in Spain have a lower exposure to English than students in such countries as Portugal and Malta (Vassiliou and Šemeta, 2012). There is: "not so much exposure to English outside the classroom" (García, 2009, p84), suggesting that transactions taking place outside the classroom are in Spanish. This is also evident from the use of Spanish-oriented social networking sites such as Tuenti, rather than international ones like Facebook, as discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The lack of English language use in daily life in Spain may also be attributed to the attitudes of influential academics, who see its use as a threat to the integrity of the Spanish language. For example, according to the then-president of the Spanish Real Academia Española (Gerritsen et al., 2007), the use of English in Spain was in 2007, 'reprehensible'. The absence of English is also evident in advertising figures (Gerritsen et al., 2007), which report that the majority of advertising campaigns are produced in Spanish, and the incidence of English words in such advertising, is much lower than in the rest of Europe. These advertising campaigns focus on the national population, or subsets of this (for example children, or teenagers). As these campaigns have a national rather than regional focus, the results can be considered a reflection of the lack of use of

English in everyday language; something evidenced also by the low uptake of English loanwords in Spanish. Naturally, attitudes towards to the use of English vary within any large country but, overall, it is evident that the uptake of English in Spanish daily life is lower than the rest of Europe.

Bilingual and trilingual policies in Spain also impacted on attitudes towards the English language. According to Lasagabaster, Cots and Mancho-Barés (2013, p757) these attitudes: "vary according to the sociolinguist context: students coming from Spanish-speaking contexts had a more supportive attitude towards the foreign-language (FL) than those students residing in Basque speaking areas".

4.2.2 The Spanish Education system and the role of English therein This section provides a brief discussion of the Spanish education system: first, the general education system will be discussed, followed by practice in bilingual system and private schools.

95% of children attended early childhood education in Spain in 2012, which starts at age three (González, 2014). Compulsory primary education, which includes learning English, commences at between six and seven years of age. Children often start learning English earlier, in the form of private tuition, than is required by law (Vassiliou and Šemeta, 2012), and sometimes as early as age three. Secondary education begins at the age of twelve and finishes at sixteen. Tracking of students' general ability leads to career choices when they are sixteen years old. This is when they are given the choice of either an academic, or a vocational track, to prepare students for the labour market (Kucel and Vilalta-Bufí, 2013). During secondary education, and irrespective of the track, all students receive English instruction for two to three hours per week (García, 2009).). Students who are prepared for the labour market can either do a further two years, or leave school at age sixteen. The students who prepare for university will do a further two years in secondary school before starting university when they are eighteen. According to González (2014) 93% of young people in 2012 were expected to complete some form of upper secondary education (either academic or vocational), whilst 29% were expected to complete their university education.

According to García (2009), at university, English is important in many subject areas which might be linked to its role in communicating international research

findings. Notwithstanding, there are limited opportunities for students at university to interact in English. Spanish universities still employ a traditional model of education which follows a teacher-centred format of lectures in which information is provided (Del Pilar Montijano Cabrera and Leggott, 2014), rather than a student-centred format which includes small groups and interaction with teachers and peers. The format for the vast majority of the classes' still encompasses lectures, suggesting that education in Spain continues to be more traditional and less student-focused than in the rest of Europe. Extensive use of assimilative activities such as lectures are shown to have a negative correlation to pass rates (Bryan, Rienties and Toetenel, 2014), which could mean that they are less effective than other methods in supporting students' learning. Another harmful side effect of the teacher-centred approach is the fact that students are likely to show a: "reluctance to play an active role in their learning in the classroom" (Del Pilar Montijano Cabrera and Leggott, 2014, p60). This reluctance to play a part in their own learning can be particularly damaging for language learners as they: "require an interactive learning environment in order to improve their proficiency in English" (Agbatogun, 2014, p266).

Spain has two types of private schools in addition to the state schools. Spanish private schools follow the Spanish syllabus, whilst international schools follow either the British or American system and are often bilingual, although the extent of this depends on the school in question. Spanish government-dependent private schools have high rates of participation compared to other countries in Europe, and these are prevalent in all levels of compulsory education (González, 2014).

4.2.3 Learning English as a foreign-language in Spain

Having considered the linguistic landscape of Spain, the education system in general, and the role of English language instruction in the education system, the following section focuses on the study of English as a foreign-language in Spain.

Between 1970 and 2000, the only foreign language taught in Spanish schools was French, with few Spanish people receiving any English language instruction during that period (Kingsley, 2011). The focus on French between 1970 and 2000 means that Spain has a much shorter tradition of introducing English tuition in school (Osa-Melero, 2012). As a consequence, English language proficiency in Spain is relatively low compared to other parts of Europe, as indicated in

Figure 2. This is an important point, as it has implications for the replicability of the study in the rest of Europe.

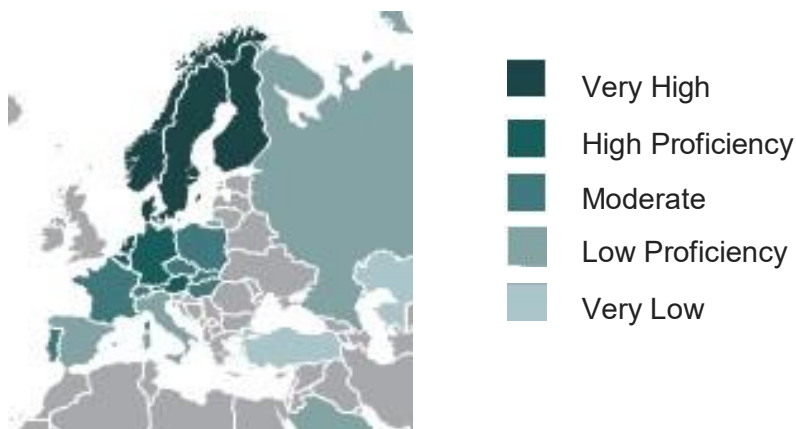


Figure 2: Proficiency of English in Europe adapted from EF EPI English Proficiency Index (McMillan, 2011)

European Community (EC) language policies have an impact on school curricula and many primary schools offer bilingual or trilingual courses as a result (Kingsley, 2011; Lasagabaster, Cots and Mancho-Barés, 2013). However, these educational policies are heavily devolved and can vary from nation to nation.

Spaniards have traditionally found it difficult to learn English and often have problems with listening and pronunciation (Kingsley, 2011; Serrano and Miralpeix, 2013). This is not exclusive to Spanish learners; most language learners consider speaking and listening to be more difficult than reading and writing, due to the speed in which interactions occur. Marek and Wu (2014) suggest that internal and external factors contribute to these difficulties: one external factor posited is that foreign television and radio programmes in Spain are often dubbed (rather than subtitled), thus reducing the population's exposure to authentic spoken English.

Another reason for this lack of proficiency could be attributed to the methods used in language education in Spain. Serrano and Miralpeix (2013) suggest that language teaching in Spain continues to be largely grammar-based. Even so, recent research projects have focused on other methods such as cooperative learning, which can be described as the information exchange through group collaboration which results in cognitive and social learning. Therefore, each student is accountable for his or her own learning and for that of the group, which increases motivation (Osa-Melero, 2012). Other projects include online reading, with the aim to: "foster the development of the metalinguistic awareness

that will enable the students to improve online reading" (Serrano and Miralpeix, 2013, p87).

In summary, then, English language teaching in Spain has been mainly teacherled and focused on grammar (Criado and Sanchez, 2009) and, as a result, the government stipulates that particular teaching practices and material must be included in the classroom. Official regulations insist on the use of communicative approaches to foreign-language education, but the level of compliance with these regulations varies widely (Criado and Sanchez, 2009).

4.3 The use of social media in Spain

Social networking sites in Spain initially had a slow uptake compared to the United Kingdom. This may be attributed to the lack of broadband in the country, to which only 58.3% of the population had access in 2013. In comparison, 75.8% of the UK population had access to broadband at that time (IAB.Europe, 2013). However, although the use of social networking sites in Spain was low in 2013 relative to other European countries, it expanded rapidly. Research and Markets (2014) state that social media advertising spent in Spain exceeded \$140 million by the end of 2013, and accounted for 11.0% of total online advertising. This represented a 63% increase in social media advertising during 2009-2013, even though overall online advertising spend declined in Spain in 2013 (Research and Markets, 2014). Putting this into context, Spain is the eighth biggest market in Europe in terms of advertising expenditure overall, whilst the UK comes first with an expenditure of close to 7.4 billion Euros (IAB.Europe, 2013).

The growth of social networking sites in Spain has been far steeper than the use of other tools such as blogs, forums or user groups. Limited examples of the use of blogs are available, for instance to help increase student motivation (Vurdien, 2013). "Social networks are clearly in the ascendancy compared to other social media forms such as blogs and user groups. Since 2009, social networks in Spain have emerged as the primary way active Internet users stay in contact with one another" (Hutton and Fosdick, 2011, p570). Whereas social network use has hardly increased between 2008 and 2011 in the United Kingdom, it has doubled in Spain, as Figure 3 shows.

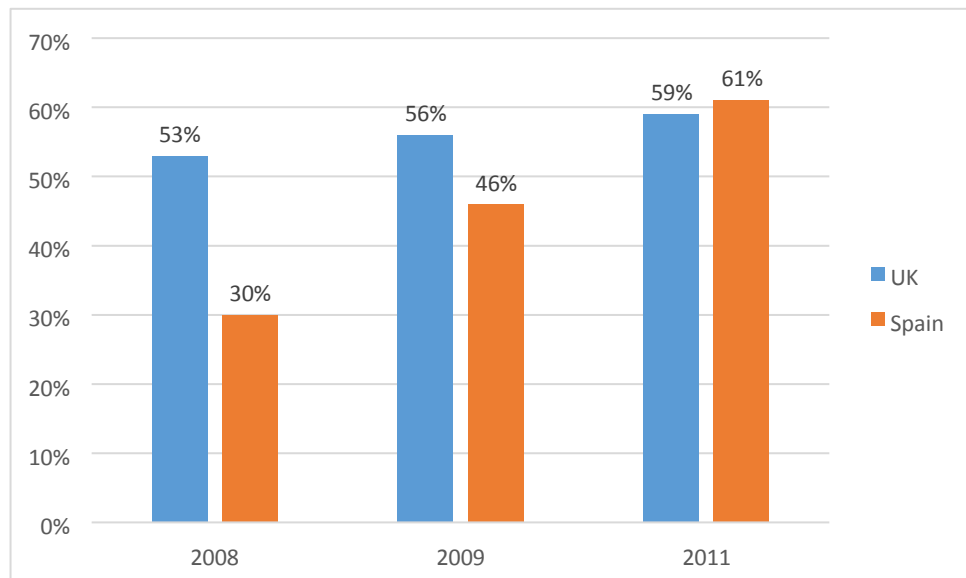


Figure 3: People who managed a profile on social networking site in last six months (adapted from Hutton and Fosdick, 2011)

Facebook has become a socialization medium as important, if not more so, than the other social networks with teenagers in Spain according to (Almansa, Fonseca and Castillo, 2013). Facebook had 18,511 unique visitors in 2013 in Spain (IAB.Europe, 2013).

Whereas Spanish teenagers tend to use social networking sites for sharing pictures, the sites provide a different offering to other groups of the population.

Social networking sites such as Facebook provide different places to socialise and share ideas. College students in particular have embraced the use of Facebook in Spain, with Mena et al. (2012, p330) stating that the use of Facebook among college users in Spain (89.8%) is similar to the figures found in the United States (95%). Their study was undertaken in a single institution in Barcelona, so it remains unclear whether this is representative for the rest of Spain. Serrano Casado (2012) argues that boundaries of space are overcome by social networking sites which provides further freedom for the individual. This does not just benefit advertisers but also political agendas. In 2011, Spain also had a political protest, which became known as the 'Spanish Revolution' or the '15M movement' (Mico and Casero-Ripolles, 2014), which saw social networking sites exploited by protesters in ways not dissimilar to what was seen during the Arab Spring. This study focuses on the use of social networking sites for education, and will not dwell further on the use of this media to pursue political agendas. However, it is important to highlight this type of activity as it has had: "a

profound impact both on Spanish society and internationally", according to Mico and Casero-Ripolles (2014, p858).

Varela-Candamio, Novo-Corti and Barreiro-Gen (2014) suggest that the social network Tuenti.com was more popular than Facebook in Spain in 2012, especially with teenagers (Apaolaza et al., 2013). Despite being more popular than Facebook, Tuenti does not appear in the top 20 most often used sites in Spain. In comparison, the most popular site that is also used in the UK is Twitter at 13th place, with 7,153 unique visitors (IAB.Europe, 2013), which suggests that Spain uses different social networking sites compared to the UK. The use of Tuenti as a Spanish social networking site, rather than the use of an international English-based version such as Facebook, is hardly surprising considering the lack of English in Spain's daily life. Although similar to Facebook, Tuenti is different in the way it can only be accessed through an invitation from another user, which is similar to the way in which Google operates, generating an increased feeling of community and importance. According to Apaolaza et al. (2013, p1282) 'Tuenti is deemed to be a more intimate social network', and is perceived to be simpler, more intuitive and easier to use than Facebook.

4.4 The use of technology in education in Spain

The level of media competency in Spanish children and young people has not yet reached an optimum level (García-Ruiz, Ramírez-García and RodríguezRosell, 2014), principally because the uptake of new technologies in Spain is low compared to the rest of Europe. In a study of both teachers and students in Las Palmas, García (2009, p89) found that technological resources are sometimes used in classes, but not in every session or setting. In addition, the technologies most used according to the students in the above study were the radio and CD player. Although other resources such as DVDs and computers were used, this study indicates that the use of technology in Spain does not universally translate to the use of more recent innovations such as social media, blogs or mobile technology. This could be due to the differences in attitude in different parts of the country. In a study of 550 secondary students in Spain, Sáinz and LópezSáez (2010, p582) found that: "adolescents from urban places behave more proactively with computers than those from rural areas". This could mean that educational practitioners in those areas do not employ technology in the same way as their urban counterparts.

The difference in penetration of technology in education would explain the use of more innovative methods in Higher Education, as universities are traditionally located in more urban environments. Examples of the innovative use of technologies such as mobile devices (García Laborda et al., 2014), blogging (Vurdien, 2013) and learning applications in Spain, are evidence that innovative methods are certainly being implemented, even though they are not distributed evenly around the country. Furthermore, these types of educational technologies serve different purposes in different settings. Mobile devices are used in education for podcasts, mp3 applications and learning apps with mixed success, but are also used for university entrance examination tests (García Laborda et al., 2014). When these innovative technologies are used, they do not always receive a positive response from students (García Laborda et al., 2014), which can be due to their lack of familiarity with using new technologies (Fernández, 2012). When innovative technologies are used, these are often a result of the interest of teachers and learners like and a: "reflection of the times" (Serrano and Miralpeix, 2013, p104). Just as discussed in the literature review chapters, Yáñez and Coyle (2011, p455) suggest that: "new technologies in second language classrooms (in particular relating to interactive white boards) require new approaches", but a wider perspective in teacher training since the presence of technology itself does not necessarily lead to improved language use in learners (Sáinz and López-Sáez, 2010).

4.5 The use of social media in education in Spain

In Spain, the use of new technology in the study of English as a foreign language has become fashionable (García, 2009), but this does not necessarily extrapolate to the use of social media in education in Spain. Mena et al. (2012, p330) report that theirs is: "The first Spanish study on the reported use of Facebook by college students", which explains the current lack of evidence concerning the use of social media in education in Spain and, in particular, in language education. López-Bonilla and López-Bonilla (2013) confirm that there is a lack of empirical studies relating to social networking sites in Spain, especially those focusing on collaborative learning. At the time of writing this thesis, though more studies had taken place as outlined in Chapter 3; the use of Twitter available in Spanish or Catalan remained limited. Moreover, Spanish teachers were less positive about the educational and future professional use of Twitter, when compared with their American counterparts (Carpenter, Tur and

Marín, 2016). In a study utilising Google + for a collaborative activity between Spanish universities, students commented on the need to improve technical equipment to enhance the user experience (Puig-Ortiz, Pàmies-Vilà and Martínez Miralles, 2015).

The affordances of social networking sites for educational purposes are clear with Fernandez-Villavicencio (2010, p124) contending that: "Web 2.0 and Social Networking tools, such as Facebook, Tuenti (in Spanish context), MySpace and Twitter, including the rich portfolio of applications they encompass, can substantially assist people in achieving that goal" - namely, becoming more digital and media literate. It can therefore be concluded that, as indicated in the literature review, the affordances associated with social media are clear, but limited studies have as yet realised these for the benefit of foreign-language education in Spain.

4.6 Implications of the context for the intervention study

Spain has a complex sociolinguistic landscape: in addition to the variety of official languages, attitudes towards language learning and the use of English vary widely from region to region. The variety of official languages used in different parts of the country impacts upon both attitude and skill in language learning, and participants in the intervention study are likely to have been affected by these context-specific attitudes. In general, the English language is not widely used in Spain in day-to-day life, but in more urban locations English does have a presence in media and interpersonal communication. In certain areas of the country, and possibly in certain population groups, an association with a Spanish identity might have a negative impact on English language learning, though it is important to note that Valladolid – where the intervention study took place – is an urban centre, and this impact might be limited. It is likely that the participants in the intervention study experienced more innovative teaching methods, use of technology and exposure to English, but it is important to compare this to the rest of the country where these experiences are likely to be more limited. Furthermore, the uptake of social media was slow compared to other countries, but Spain is catching up quickly. International sites such as Facebook and Twitter are popular, but a Spanish social networking site called Tuenti is also used widely, and particularly by teenagers. As a result, it is likely

that the participants in this intervention study encountered less informal English in their daily lives, than might their European counterparts.

As discussed in the Chapter 3, studies on second language education in other countries (Stapa and Shaari, 2012; Toetenel, 2014) suggest that social networking sites increase the communicative character of second language learning, although no foreign-language education studies to date have researched this topic. This study intends to make a first step in filling this research gap by contributing to the academic field through the introduction of a social networking site as a medium of instruction.

4.7 Summary

This chapter considered the context for the intervention study held in Spain, starting with an overview of the Spanish linguistic landscape. It described the changing role of Spanish and the four minority official languages, in daily life and in education, as a result of external political influences. The chapter focused on changes related to English instruction and the use of English in daily life, and discussed the education system and use of technology in education overall. Next, the chapter considered the use of social media in daily life and education: it was concluded that foreign-language teaching in Spain is generally teacherled, and the use of educational technology is limited; as a result, students are unlikely to be familiar with Sociocultural aspects of teaching such as peer-to-peer interaction and online discussions. The chapter endeavoured to provide an overview of studies employing social media sites, but limited studies have been undertaken (or are reported in English).

Chapter 5 Research Methodology: An exploratory study employing a one- group pretest-posttest intervention, analysed through a survey of perceived contextappropriateness

5.1 Introduction

Exploratory research can provide new perspectives and innovation in educational practice, which is important in an age of measurement (Biesta,

2010). In this study, this was realised by employing an exploratory research methodology. A one-group pretest-posttest design was used, which was evaluated via a quantitative-qualitative mixed-methods approach. The overview of the study shown on page 67 of this chapter, outlines the two different stages of the study. In Stage One, which took place in Spain, fifteen participants took part in the one-group pretest-posttest intervention, and the data collected was used to design a questionnaire. In Stage Two, which took place in the UK, this questionnaire was distributed to ninety students at a further education college, with fifty completing and returning the survey.

The chapter first introduces the purpose of the research and epistemological and ontological foundations. It then describes the application of an experimental, one-group pretest-posttest design for the intervention in Stage One and the Survey Research in Stage Two. The researcher played different roles in this study, which are described in detail. Sampling of the participants and the three ethical considerations associated with the study design are then discussed, after the data collection and analysis methods, which include the quantitative linguistic analysis of the features of the informal register, qualitative analysis of the researcher's observations, and open comment data. The merits and limitations of the chosen design are also justified in this chapter, followed by a summary of the implications of the research design in terms of validity and reliability.

5.2 Purpose of research

Investigation of the use of the informal register by foreign-language learners is a complex educational issue, as it is a multi-disciplinary problem covering theory, sociolinguistics, pedagogy and e-learning. In Stage One, for practical and ethical reasons, the study employed a one-group pretest-posttest intervention; a practice commonplace in studies like these where the fields of study are relatively unknown (Hedrick, Bickman and Rog, 1993, p39).

The overall research question for this project is:

Does dedicated classroom instruction in the use of the informal register, delivered through social networking sites, influence students' communicative

interactions as measured through linguistic analysis and the perceptions of a sample of speakers of English?

This overarching research question can be divided into the following subquestions, the findings for which are reported in Chapter 7:

1. How did students use the targeted features of the informal language, as measured at the beginning and end of the intervention study?
2. What impact did the study have on students' communicative interactions with their peers?
3. Which factors influenced the ways in which speakers of English perceived the appropriateness of the posts generated during Stage One of the study?

The following sections describe the stages of the fieldwork, and the data collection and analysis methods employed to address these research questions.

5.3 Stages of the fieldwork

The fieldwork was undertaken in two stages, with Stage One an intervention study, and Stage Two a survey. The two stages of fieldwork are briefly outlined here, so that the following sections of this chapter can be considered in the context of the fieldwork. A more detailed description of the fieldwork is included in Chapter Six.

Stage One

Fifteen Stage One participants were recruited from a private language school in North West Spain. The group was recruited via their tutor, so the researcher never met the participants. The precise demographic make-up and age range within the group is not available, but the tutor confirmed that the group consisted of students or young professionals. Further details for the Stage One participants are included in section 6.3. The participants were asked to complete five online sessions over the course of three months. These sessions were delivered on Ning, and included teaching materials on use of the informal register. Participants completed one session each week, with assessment tasks set in the first and last sessions. Each week, participants were asked to post material on Ning in response to lesson material provided in a Microsoft Word file, and were asked also to complete some of the activities contained therein. Students

uploaded a document with their completed work onto Ning, while Ning posts (the site's internal chat facility) were used for peer-to-peer communication. The Word documents and the material posted on Ning were collected and stored securely by the researcher, along with emails between the researcher and the participants' teacher. A detailed description of the task design is included in Chapter Six, whilst the lesson materials have been replicated in the Appendix.

Stage Two

Stage Two took place after the intervention study in Stage One as indicated in Table 6. The assessment posts generated in Stage One were used to design a questionnaire for Stage Two, which was distributed to speakers of English. To produce the questionnaires, five sets of tasks produced by Stage One participants were selected. The first ten questions of the questionnaire asked the participants for consent and demographic data, after which twenty questions relating to the use of the informal register were included. These questions were compiled from the initial and final assessments. Further details as to the questionnaire design is included in 6.10. In Stage Two, the questionnaires completed by fifty speakers of English represented the main source of data, although observations made by the researcher when distributing the questionnaires, were considered also.

Table 6 Stages of the project

Stages	Tasks
Stage One	Final study design for Stage One
	Training of teachers for the intervention project.
	Intervention project
	Data Analysis
Stage Two	Design of questionnaire
	Recruitment and briefing of speakers of English
	Data analysis

5.4 Epistemology

“Research is undertaken within a framework of a set of philosophies”, as Kumar (2014, p8) notes. These philosophies can be of either an epistemological or an ontological nature but are not mutual exclusive. Epistemological beliefs are those related to the understanding of, and commitment to, the nature of research and the types of conclusions that can be drawn from it, for example, the importance of a sociocultural approach to language teaching in this study. The researcher’s stance is that research findings provide evidence to substantiate a claim and that knowledge “is understood to evolve over time and become more refined with additional reasoning and new evidence” (Trevors et al., 2017, p118). Educational research has inherent complexities due to its multidimensional nature which hinder claims that the ‘outputs’ of educational research are the single effect of the ‘inputs’ (Biesta, 2016), as discussed in more detail in 5.6. The use of mixed methods as discussed in 5.11 aims to distinguish the ontological foundations of research, considering both the ‘objective’ research findings, e.g. the presence of informal register features in the students’ posts versus the ‘internal’ findings, as in the perceptions of Speakers of English.

5.5 Ontology

Ontological foundations focus upon whether “social reality is external” (e.g. objective in nature), or is rather a product of a person’s cognition (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p5). Postpositive research is positioned around the belief that there is one single truth, but accepts that this can never be fully understood through research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Postpositivism is the foundation of this study, as this study’s position is that the truth when applied to language research is both ‘external’, objective in nature, as well as ‘internal’, based upon other’s perceptions. As such, the ‘external’ reality was measured by the language produced by Stage One participants, in terms of grammatical errors or linguistic features. This, however, is not the only reality. The ‘internal’ reality was measured by the perception of other speakers of English.

Both epistemological and ontological considerations shaped the study, not just in the design but also during the analysis stages. During the study design, being able to view social reality as both internal and external, impacted the way in which the intervention project was evaluated. As the internal and external realities were perceived as 'real', both internal methods of evaluation (linguistic

features) and external methods (sociolinguistic features) were used in the analysis stage.

5.6 The application of an experimental, one-group pretestposttest design for dedicated instruction

As stated in section 5.4, in many cases, educational research has inherent complexities as the inputs and variables of the research cannot all be controlled. For instance, the researcher has no control over elements which have been proven to impact language development, such as student motivation, exposure to target language (other than the intervention study), practice and educational background (Habók and Magyar, 2018). Section 5.4 noted that Biesta (2016) claims that the 'outputs' of educational research cannot be attributed to the 'inputs', in the case of this project the intervention study. Because of the inability to control all variables, educational research often does not lend itself to strictly experimental investigations. The interpretivist paradigm asserts a belief that the 'meaning' and value of educational research can reside in smaller-scale, indicative studies that may not be generalisable but are 'relatable' or transferrable', enabling further studies to apply the innovative features in larger scale studies.

Apart from an experimental design (which, as mentioned earlier in this section, is often not possible), several other research designs could have been selected for this study, for example a case study. Interpretivist approaches associated with case studies are aligned more closely with the ontological view that in the social world human attitudes and perceptions are valid objects for study, and that small-scale 'non-generalisable' studies also have merit.

The postpositivist view of the researcher led her to acknowledge the need to consider the social reality of the online ESOL social networking site as both **subjectively experienced** and **actually present** in the external world. This suggested a research design that elicited and analysed both (external) measurable information such as numbers of sociolinguistic features and subjective (internal) views such as the self-reflection of the researcher and participants.

The choices made by the researcher were pragmatic after consideration of ethical issues, the impact on research outcomes, and the scale of the

intervention in terms of the numbers of students recruited. This research project therefore follows, according to Kerlinger (1970, in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001), a “compromise design” whereby “the random selection or random assignment of schools and classrooms is quite impracticable” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p322). A one-group pretest-posttest design can be referred to as a compromised ‘experiment’ as several factors, such as testing for instance, are not controlled.

The participants of this study were learning language in a multidimensional context that included not only their exposure to the informal register in language classes but also in use at work, and with family and friends. Such ‘complexifying’ contextual issues are common risks in one-group pretest-posttest design, where benefits caused by external factors might be incorrectly attributed to the intervention. However as this study took place over three months, the possible negative impact of the design upon internal validation might be considered to be limited (Gay, 2009).

The study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design in which fifteen advanced foreign-language learners completed study materials comprising of listening, reading, writing and ‘speaking’ activities, which focussed on the instruction of the informal register, over a period of five weeks. The ‘speaking’ activities were undertaken using asynchronous chat on the social networking site. The activities were delivered through a social media site called Ning. The benefit of the one-group pretest-posttest design for this study was that all participants could take part in the study. The consequence of a true experimental design would have been that half of Stage One participants would have completed only one of the two assessment posts, without having access to the learning materials or the social networking site. As the participant number was only fifteen, had these been split into two smaller groups of seven and eight, it would have been harder still to extrapolate from the sample to a population. Furthermore, it was anticipated that the Ning project would allow students to practice use of informal language, whilst simultaneously providing them with an increased awareness of safety implications when using social networking sites. It could be argued that a true experimental design; one, for instance, without the use of a social networking site, would not have been in the best interest of the participants involved.

Another reason for favouring the one-group pretest-posttest design, over a true experimental design, is that not all external factors can be eradicated in a research design: this is often the case in educational research. For instance, the effectiveness of the intervention might also be dependent upon the amount of time that the participants spent on the study material, or their motivation. When a study takes place in a classroom, motivation and effort can be observed, but this was not possible in this online study. Questionnaires were designed to measure time spent during the intervention study, but it is the case that students tend to overestimate time spent studying (Taraban, Maki and Rynearson, 1999).

The intervention can be classified as an internet-based experiment, as it was distributed via a social networking site (Ning). Ning is often used in education, as it boasts the aspects of social networking sites, while enabling the administrator to set up a private community. This means that Ning can be used for a particular class, group or research project as required, as learners use it to access learning materials online. Reips (2002) suggests that internet-based experiments have a high degree of voluntariness, with the result that more authentic behaviours can be observed. The aim of the study was to create an environment in which participants could use the informal register in an authentic manner; the degree of voluntariness associated with the study was therefore a key consideration. Stage One participants accessed the materials on Ning, then followed a link to the materials and instructions.

5.7 Survey Research

The fieldwork in Stage Two was delivered via a survey. As such, a questionnaire was provided to the speakers of English. The speakers of English rated the appropriateness of the posts included in the questionnaire for the context set out in the questionnaire. In the questionnaire, participants were asked to rate each post on the following Likert scale:



Figure 4: Likert scale answer options survey perceived-context appropriateness

The outcome of these perceptions of the speakers of English was then analysed and compared to the frequency of informal register features. The advantage of using a survey is that it is relatively easy to collect a large, comparable sample of data in a short period of time. As this survey was designed based upon the posts from Stage One, large quantities of text needed to be included.

In advance of the survey proper, the questionnaire was piloted using a similar participant group, namely, teachers working in an educational institution. As part of the pilot phase, the researcher made sure that participants with knowledge of different languages (including Spanish) were included. The questionnaire was designed to be delivered in paper format because, even though there are significant advantages in distributing surveys electronically, particularly in terms of data analysis, not all participants had access to electronic devices at the time that the survey was undertaken. Electronic delivery would also have been preferred, as the avoidance of manual entry into statistical software reduces the scope for human error. These benefits, however, were outweighed by the fact that exclusively electronic delivery would have precluded some participants from completing the questionnaire at the point of distribution. Asking participants to complete a questionnaire at home might have resulted not only in a lower participation rate but also less accurate data, as participants might not remember the instructions provided. For these reasons, the questionnaire was delivered in paper format and the risk of transferring information mitigated via additional data checks. As a result, distribution was more complex in terms of sampling, questionnaire format and distribution time.

Participants were encouraged to select one answer option, with the option of selecting more, if they considered this more appropriate. The five options utilised in this study (included in Table 7) included a 'not sure' option as Dolnicar and Grün (2014) have shown that this improves the quality of the survey data.

Table 7: Answer options survey perceived-context appropriateness:

Answer options	These might include:
Incorrect use of language	Spelling mistakes
Not appropriate for the context provided	Correct use of language, but not appropriate in the context of the conversation or the delivery method.
Not sure	Not sure as to what answer to select
Correct use, but I would not use it this way	Acceptable use of language, but this is not the way that I would personally use it.
Appropriate for the context.	Language used is appropriate for the context.

The completion rate of the questionnaire was 50% (50 out of 101 learners), which, in light of the fact that survey completion rates have been reducing over recent years (Hansen and Smith, 2012), was a higher completion rate than had been anticipated.

5.8 Role of the researcher

In this study, the researcher took on several roles in Stage One of the study, including that of recruiter, material designer, tutor, teacher and assessor. In Stage Two of the study, the researcher played the role of a guest-speaker. It must be noted that the researcher is a qualified and experienced language teacher, teacher trainer, online learning designer and developer. As such, the relationships with the school and colleges to recruit participants were professional and collegial.

The first role of the researcher was to recruit participants to take part in the research project. These were recruited via the European Association for Computer Assisted Language Learning, as the intention was to offer to a larger and more diverse population, the opportunity to participate in this study, as opposed to, say, recruiting from local schools or colleges. As a result, the researcher never met the contact representatives from the partner organisation nor indeed the students taking place in the intervention project: this meant that

the researcher was considered an outsider by the participants. This is important, as the role of a researcher in educational studies can be blurred, particularly in this study, as the participants were 'taught' by the researcher, in the sense that the researcher developed all learning materials and provided support. In many educational research projects, the researcher observes the intervention, whilst the class is still taught by their existing teacher. This dual role of teacher / researcher had advantages from an ethical perspective, as participants felt less pressure to join the intervention study. Naturally, there are also drawbacks in this type of online research, including a limit to the amount of control that a researcher might have over the project's execution.

The second role of the researcher was to design the materials provided on Ning. The task design for the learning materials is included in Chapter Six, with a copy of all materials appearing in the Appendix.

The third role of the researcher, was that of a tutor, as support and guidance was important in order for participants to become familiar with online learning generally, and the use of Ning in particular. Chapter 6 set out the context for this study and outlined that learning methods which aim to engage students (such as interactive online learning materials) are relatively rare in Spain. As such, the researcher monitored posts and provided guidance and support where needed.

The fourth role of the researcher was that of language teacher. The content provided in the learning materials was designed to teach students the use of the informal register. In this role, the researcher also monitored and corrected posts. To stimulate interaction, corrections were made only when necessary and, if made, were accompanied with encouragement and further explanations.

The fifth role of the researcher was that of an assessor. As part of the intervention study, students completed two assessments. These assessments posts were assessed by the researcher and linguistically analysed.

The final role of the researcher was that of a guest speaker, with the researcher presenting the research to potential Stage Two participants principally in order to recruit.

5.9 Sampling of participants

In Stage One, the fifteen participants were recruited from a private language school in North West Spain (also referred to as School X), where they were enrolled on an English course. In Stage Two, fifty participants were recruited from a Further Education college in the South of England, where they undertook a teacher training course. The sampling method used is sometimes referred to as judgmental, or purposive sampling (Johnson, 2014), as the researcher specifies the characteristics of the population.

The advantage of purposive sampling was that the researcher could match certain characteristics of Stage Two participants to those of Stage One participants. Because Stage One participants were mainly 'professionals', Stage Two participants were recruited from a trainee teacher course, as these participants were also 'professionals' as well as teachers. Random sampling was not an option for this survey, as the ability of a general audience to assess posts based upon criteria relating to register appropriateness might be limited. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher access to a teacher training institution to brief the participants and to support them in completing the questionnaire.

In educational research, purposive sampling is frequently used, as random sampling is not practical. Random sampling is representative of the population involved (Gay, 2009). As the questions asked in the survey were complex and focused on specific technical information, random sampling was not appropriate and purposive sampling was used instead. Limitations of purposive sampling could impact reliability as the researcher may overlook differences in the sampling group (Alnofaie, 2013, p156). To address this, purposive sampling was employed in Stages One and Two, but the differences within the groups (for instance language ability in Stage One, and experience with social networking sites in Stage Two) were clearly outlined and taken into consideration when analysing the findings. Chapter 6 provides further details about the demographics and role of the participants in both stages of the intervention study.

5.10 Ethical Issues

Campbell and Groundwater-Smith (2007, p10) suggest that researchers “do not intend to act unethically, but have a lack of awareness or thought as to what constitutes ethical behaviour”. In order to ensure that ethical considerations were addressed, the research adhered to ethical guidelines set by Oxford Brookes University. Festinger, Marczyk and DeMatteo (2005) suggest that the first rule of thumb is to ensure that participation in research does not cause harm to participants, with the second being that benefits to the participants should be maximised, and potential harm or discomfort, minimised. The researcher’s attitude toward the language learners who participated in the study was both professionally caring and appropriate as a teacher, and ethically careful as a researcher (to ensure that participants derive benefit from their engagement). To adhere to these guidelines, the research design was scrutinised by the researcher, the supervision team, and the research ethics committee at Oxford Brookes University.

Some researchers imply that ethical considerations should come 'naturally' to researchers. Corrigan (2001) suggests that the individual desire for ethical conduct, combined with the need for the university to maintain public trust, should inevitably lead to ethical research in which a system of scrutiny is unnecessary. Studies such as this research project, dispute Corrigan’s (2001) views, as a university research ethics committee has a role in supporting a researcher by highlighting risks associated with the study design which may not be immediately apparent: the potential risks associated with storing the Ning data on a central server abroad, for instance.

In addition to the necessity of following ethical procedures as a requirement for this thesis, the researcher is in any case keen to address ethical issues, as it would be unjust to give the participants the impression that their cooperation would influence the outcome of their course results. Oxford Brookes University’s code of practice on ethical standards for research involving human participants, outlines a framework for how such research should be undertaken.

The key points to which this study has adhered are:

- no research should cause harm, and preferably it should benefit participants;
- participants should be free from coercion of any kind and should not be pressured to participate in a study;
- informal consent should be obtained; and
- any data should be treated in line with the Data Protection Act 1998 and information should be provided to all parties involved regarding the outcome of the study.

In line with these guidelines, Stage One participants were given an explanation about the study by their teacher, using information provided by the researcher. This information contained a letter from the researcher and consent forms, all included in Appendix III. The consent forms also provided the participants the opportunity to opt-out of the intervention study at any stage which is in line with the guidelines for reasonably informed consent (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p51). Both the students' teacher and the letter from the researcher sought to reassure students that they were free to decide whether to participate: it was stressed that participation would have no effect on their marks for the course. The researcher also explained that there was insufficient evidence to suggest that there were any identifiable risks or benefits to participation in the study. If students in the intervention project had not wanted to provide their own email address to access the Ning system, they would have been provided with an alternative, anonymous email address for this purpose. In the event, this facility was not requested. All participant data and posts on Ning were removed when the social networking group was terminated upon completion of the study: the anonymised, aggregated data will be stored for ten years in line with the regulations stipulated by Oxford Brookes University, which were repeated in the participation information letters. The study also anticipated various benefits for the participants, as the additional learning materials provided in Ning were designed to improve the awareness of participants to use the informal register. Furthermore, participation was likely to improve the participants overall English due to additional English practice. The engagement with the social networking

site would make participants more aware of the risk related to cyberbullying and aided participants in developing digital literacy skills.

Stage Two participants were given an explanation of the study by the researcher, who presented the research project as a guest speaker. The information was conveyed through a short video, after which students could ask questions. The researcher's guest lecture supported the FE teachers, as it provided a real-life example of how research might be carried out. The lecture included all stages of the project such as identification of the research question, research design (including ethical standards), data collection and analysis. This topic was relevant to all students, as they themselves produce their own action research project at the end of the year. In one of the groups, the researcher could not be present, so the video was played in her absence. All information was summarised in participant information sheets and consent forms, which were distributed with the questionnaires. This information is also included in Appendix III. Withdrawing from the study at any stage was not possible for the participants in Stage Two, due to the anonymous nature of the questionnaire, and this was noted in the information sessions presented by the researcher, in the participant information sheet, as well as in the consent forms.

5.11 Data collection techniques

Thomsen, Straubhaar and Bolyard (1998 as quoted in Harrison and Thomas 2009) present a strong case for what they consider to be the best approach for investigating online communities, including social networking sites. They sought to investigate whether quantitative approaches could provide the detailed type of data needed for analysing concepts such as social interaction, and thus the use of social register, and concluded that qualitative approaches provide a context to the research findings. This study utilises a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data, which can be described as a 'mixed-method approach'.

Mixedmethod approaches are popular because they make it easier to combine practical, appropriate data collection methods, to better address the research question.

Using a mixed-method approach had other benefits. On one hand, mixedmethods are often used to increase reliability of a study's findings by triangulating the study's findings, though gathering and analysing data from several sources (Burns, 1999, p25). The quantitative-qualitative model utilised in

this study, is also referred to as the ‘triangulation mixed methods design’, as quantitative and qualitative data are equally weighted. Taraban, Maki and Rynearson (1999) refer to this method as the most challenging type of mixed method research.

Quantitative methods focus on 'what is happening', whilst qualitative methods focus on 'why is this happening?'. Qualitative research can be used in an iterative process, with the research moving back and forth between data collection, and analysis and interpretation depending on the results (Dörnyei 2003, p243). This iterative process is, however, vulnerable to the introduction of bias: to mitigate that risk in this study, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods was used. The quantitative methods measured the effect of the intervention in Stage One and the analysis of the questionnaire in Stage Two, whilst the qualitative methods were applied in a more iterative manner, to acquire a deeper understanding of the underlying processes driving the results.

The aim of the study was to evaluate the use of the informal register through analysing both qualitative and quantitative data sources. The data collection techniques used are listed in Table 8.

Table 8: Data collection techniques

Stage	Data	Data collection technique
Stage One	Language self- assessment	Pre-experiment assessment
Stage One	Language self- assessment	Post-experiment assessment
Stage One	Initial assessment included in the first week’s study material, completed online by students	Pre-experiment assessment
Stage One	independently. Final assessment included in the last week’s study material, completed online by students	Post-experiment assessment
Stage One	independently. Students’ posts	Monitoring and moderating
Stage Two	Questionnaires completed by Speakers of English	Survey
Stage Two	Researcher notes	Observation

The effectiveness of the intervention could be gauged via the difference in the use of the informal register by the participants between the initial and final assessments. However, the use of the register on its own does not mean that participants are able to provide comments acceptable to other speakers. A

different way of assessing the effectiveness of the intervention is by considering the 'appropriateness' of the language produced by the participants. The intervention study focussed therefore on identifying an improvement which could be analysed both linguistically (in terms of the register features for instance) and practically, in the real world (in terms of the perceptions of appropriateness by the speakers of English).

Throughout the intervention project, students' posts were monitored by the researcher: primarily to track progress and participation. The monitoring process contributed to the field notes and observations. The posts were also monitored for ethical reasons, to minimise the risk of cyber bullying. Moderation took place subtly; posts were neither edited nor deleted, but the researcher highlighted mistakes by providing additional content. The moderator also demonstrated a 'presence' and commented on the initial posts to stimulate peer-interaction on the social networking site. An aim of the study was to encourage peers to 'talk' online, so that they created an authentic setting to practice the use of the informal register. Swann (1994) states that there are two forms of observation commonly described in researching 'talk' in education settings: participant observation and non-participant observation. She observes that the distinction is not clear-cut, as the teacher is often a participant in this 'talk', even if not directly present. Although Swann's observations relate to real-time talk, this could be transferred to 'talk' on social networking sites. In this study, the relationship between participant observation and non-participant observation is even more complicated, because the 'teacher' and the 'researcher' both participate in the online interactions. Therefore, it could be argued that the 'researcher' also plays the role of the 'teacher' in the provision of the course material, and 'talk' might reasonably include the encouragement provided by the researcher to support students when using Ning. Therefore, interaction was analysed through identification of the originator, as is common in social network analysis, instead of describing 'talk' according to Swann's (1994) classification.

The aim of Stage Two was to analyse the Stage One posts from a sociolinguistic perspective, as the study highlighted the need for appropriate use of the informal register to integrate into society. The planned sociolinguistic element in the study was undertaken by the administering of a questionnaire to speakers of English - also referred to as Stage Two of the fieldwork.

5.12 Data analysis

The data analysis methods are summarised in Table 9 and are discussed in detail in the following chapters. In this chapter, the rationale for the methods selected is described, whilst their detailed use is described in Chapter Six. In brief, in Stage One, two assessments were completed by participants as part of the learning materials provided on Ning. The two assessments were analysed based upon linguistic frequency and the analytical method and linguistic taggers used are discussed in Chapter Six. The student posts were analysed based upon peer-to-peer interaction as discussed in Chapter Nine. In Stage Two, Likert scale ratings were used to analyse the questionnaires, to provide a measure of perceived context-appropriateness of the Stage Two participants. The analysis of perceived context-appropriateness was compared to the linguistic features present in the text, but also to the demographic data of the Stage Two participants. To compare perceived context-appropriateness with the response patterns of the Stage Two participants, a heat map was produced. Finally, the open comments in the questionnaire were analysed using a word frequency counter, before further qualitative analysis took place.

Table 9: Data analysis techniques for Stage One and Two individually

	Data	Qualitative	Quantitative
Stage One	Initial assessment	N/A	Average linguistic feature frequency
			Individual linguistic feature frequency
	Final assessment	N/A	Average linguistic feature frequency
			Individual linguistic feature frequency
	Students' posts	Thematical content analysis of informal register use	N/A
	Students' posts	Classification of responders and lurkers	Analysis of student interaction in response of learning materials
Researcher's notes	Observation of students' interaction on Ning		

	Emails between researcher and Stage One participants' teacher	Observation of students' interaction on Ning and selfdeclared language levels	
Stage Two	Speakers of English questionnaire	N/A	Likert scale rating of samples
	Speakers of English questionnaire	Qualitative analysis of the comments	Word frequency counter
	Speakers of English questionnaire	N/A	Heat map

Table 10: Data analysis techniques for Stage One and Two combined

Type of analysis	Data	Qualitative	Quantitative
Linguistic analysis	Stage One Pre- and postintervention assessments, completed online by the students.	Analysis of open comments in the questionnaires	Average linguistic feature frequency versus questionnaire rating
			Average linguistic feature frequency per participant versus questionnaire rating
			Individual linguistic feature frequency versus questionnaire rating
			Weighted average linguistic feature frequency versus questionnaire rating
			Weighted individual linguistic feature frequency versus questionnaire rating
Linguistic analysis by selfdeclared language level	Stage One Pre- and postintervention assessments, completed online by the students. These assessments were analysed using the selfdeclared language levels of Stage One participants.		Self-declared language levels versus questionnaire rating

Table 10: Data analysis techniques for Stage One and Two combined (continued)

Type of analysis	Data	Qualitative	Quantitative
Contextperceived appropriateness provided by Two participants	Stage Two participated rated Stage One Pre- and postintervention assessments, referred to as contextperceived appropriateness. These ratings were compared to the demographic data of Stage Two participants including age and gender. The ratings were also compared to previous use of social networking sites by Stage Two participants and their knowledge of Spanish.	N/A	Age of Stage Two participants versus questionnaire rating
		N/A	Gender of Stage Two participants versus questionnaire rating
		Analysis of open comments in the questionnaires	Knowledge of languages (in particular Spanish) of Stage Two participants versus questionnaire rating
		N/A	Prior use of social networking site versus questionnaire rating

		Open comments provided by Stage Two participants regarding profession and researcher observations	
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5.11.1 Quantitative data analysis

The use of quantitative data provided objectivity to the research findings (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001) which is why quantitative linguistic analysis was undertaken using corpus linguistics techniques, utilising the text produced by Stage One participants as the corpora (also referred to as 'corpora-assisted analysis') (Partington (2006, as cited in Baker, 2010)). Corpora-based linguistic analysis focus on frequency, saliency and consistency (Baker, 2010, p27). In this instance, the focus was principally on frequency and consistency, for example the count of the taught informal register features and consistency in their occurrence), whilst saliency was included in the qualitative analysis (for example appropriateness of using the informal register features).

The posts on the social networking site were the main source for the quantitative data analysis, which focused on the distribution of linguistic features including 'that' deletion, as well as ellipses, contractions and amplifiers. The frequency with which these features occurred was analysed using both a word-frequency macro, and a corpus tagger. As the study included features of the informal register as identified by Biber (1995), it was deemed important to use the tagging methodology used in this study, in order for the analysis to be comparable. Corpus tagging was undertaken to contribute to the research field by including the linguistic characteristics of the language used on social networking sites as suggested by Titak and Roberson (2013). The posts that the participants completed both before and after the intervention project were analysed through automatic taggers. The first is the Multidimensional Analysis Tagger (MAT). Nini (2014, p1) explains that "MAT is a program for Windows that replicates Biber's (1988) tagger for the multidimensional functional analysis of English texts, generally applied for studies on text type or genre variation". MAT was based

upon the work of Toutanova et al. (2003). The second tagger used was CLAWS, the Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System, which utilised 100 million words of the British National Corpus.

The assessment posts were first entered through MAT which resulted in tagged entries such as the one displayed below (Figure 5). The data were then cleaned by removing the text, so that only the tags themselves remained. These tags were then analysed through a frequency-count macro, a quick way to count the most frequent features present in a given post.

In Stage One, the student posts and the assessments that took place in the first and fifth (final) week were analysed to evaluate use of targeted features of the informal register.

Hey John! How are things? Too much time
without news from you! I hope
you'll ok and meet in London after my exam
in July!

Figure 5: Assessment post entry in plain text

These posts were then analysed manually using a method based on a combination of using the MAT and CLAWS taggers, followed by a manual quality check. This method analysed the frequency of contractions, emphatic language, exclamation marks, informal nouns, adverbs and abbreviations, further discussed in Chapter 6.

Interaction on social networking sites was analysed through manual social network analysis, based upon the importance of relationships among the interacting units or people in the network (Wasserman and Faust, 1994).). Social network analysis highlights the relationship between nodes (individual actors, people, or things within the network; in this case the learners and researcher) and the links (relationships or interactions) that connect them. This Stage Two questionnaire was based on the posting data provided by participants in Stage One. The Stage Two participants' free text comments in the questionnaires were analysed in relation to word frequency, and this analysis revealed a series of themes, which are reported in the findings chapter.

5.11.2 Qualitative data analysis

In this study, data was derived from observations, field notes, emails and posts on the social networking sites. When analysing qualitative data, the researcher can look either for its nomothetic or idiographic properties. Nomothetic analysis utilises aggregated data to identify patterns, whilst idiographic analysis focuses on the behaviour of the individual (Fisher, Newman and Molenaar, 2011). This study focuses on both the nomothetic properties of the data including patterns, themes, universals and similarities (such as the patterns in the use of the features of the informal register), and on the idiographic properties, which consider individual or unique events, people, behaviours and contexts (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001).

The posts on the social networking site were mainly analysed quantitatively. However, during the study, the posts were also used as an observation tool for the researcher to review the participants' progress regarding familiarisation with the site as well as group formation. The initial linguistic (quantitative) analysis was also used for further (qualitative) analysis to provide a thematical content analysis of the informal register features produced by Stage One participants. This was also the case for the analysis of interaction, the posts were analysed using a (quantitative) social networking analysis, after which the (qualitative) classification of 'lurkers' and 'responders' took place.

5.13 Merits and limitations of the method

5.13.1 Research validity and reliability

Two types of validity are described by Nunan (1992, p15): internal validity, which refers to the interpretability of the research; and external validity, which refers to the extent to which the results of a study may be applied to the wider population. Although the sample size for the intervention study in this research project was small (fifteen students in Stage One), it was anticipated that, due to the exploratory nature of the study, these findings would represent a starting point for further, larger-scale research projects. The second stage of the study sought to analyse the findings in Stage One by utilising the perceptions of the Stage Two participants. To ensure that trends could be identified in the perception of Stage Two participants, a larger sample size was needed; ultimately, fifty respondents completed the questionnaire, and it was felt that this was sufficient to substantiate the findings. However, as the sample population was based in a

single institution in a Southern English county, further research would be needed to validate these findings for the general population.

The internal validity of this study is enhanced by the validation of a team of well-established researchers, as the study was supervised by Dr Yiakoumetti and Dr

Haight, who could be defined as 'critical friends'. McNiff and Whitehead (2010, p173) state that the critical friend should be a confidante or mentor and is expected to talk through the research at regular intervals. McNiff and Whitehead describe the critical friend to be internal to the project whilst Bayne-Jardine and Holly (1994 as quoted in McNiff and Whitehead) describe them as more of an outsider process consultant. These views do not necessarily have to be a contradiction; an external consultant can still provide mentoring at regular intervals. Dr Yiakoumetti and Dr Haight have assisted this project in this way and ensured that it was evaluated at regular intervals.

The validity of the project is strengthened through the use of multiple data sources. Burns (1999, p25) supports this approach, and suggests that triangulation – which involves the gathering of data from various different sources in order that the research findings may be tested against each other – increases the reliability and validity of research. These issues of validity and reliability are key requirements for upholding the conclusions of any research project, but should be considered in light of the exploratory nature of the research design and the sample sizes involved.

5.13.2 Application to a larger population

The notion of 'reliability' refers to consistency and replication over time, and is applicable both to the methods utilised and the population studied (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001). There was no intention to reproduce the entire research design for a greater application, due to the exploratory nature of the study. As Scott and Usher (2010) indicated, the lack of a control group poses a risk when extrapolating research to a larger population. The external reliability of this study therefore might be limited, as a consequence of the study's design. Internal validity, that is, the consistency of the data collection, analysis and interpretation, was considered and evaluated at each stage of the research design and implementation. As the findings in this study will be of interest to

teachers and policy makers, further research with a larger number of participants - ideally using randomised control trials - is required.

5.14 Summary

This chapter started with an outline of the researcher's view of the purpose of the study, followed by its epistemological and ontological foundations. It then outlined the two stages, and the time-table for the intervention and survey. The different roles undertaken by the researcher during the study, and the impact of these upon the study's findings, have been discussed. The challenges associated with educational research have been described, and the sampling methods justified. Qualitative and quantitative data collection methods have been described, as has the relationship between the different sources of data. The chapter concluded with an overview of the merits and the limitations of the study, followed by suggestions for further research which might serve to validate the study's findings.

Chapter 6: Fieldwork

6.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the two stages of the fieldwork undertaken as part of the study. In Stage One, fifteen students in a language school in Spain completed tasks on a social networking site called Ning. In Stage Two, a survey took place in a further education college in England, where fifty participants completed a questionnaire. Figure 6 shows the relationship between the two stages and the main activities involved.

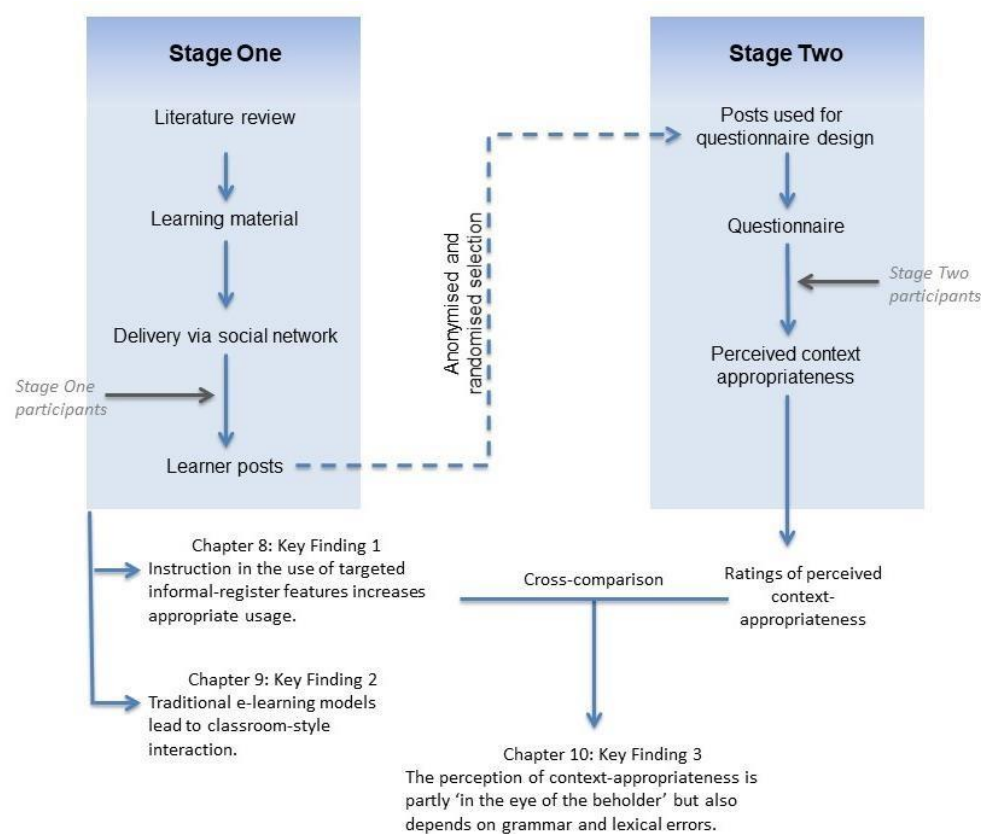


Figure 6: Overview of the intervention and headline key findings

In Stage One, the aim of the intervention study was to develop the learners' proficiency in using features of the English informal register. The intervention study took place over a period of three months, in which the students were provided with materials outlining the features of the informal register and were given the opportunity to practice these features. Assessments took place before and after the intervention study, so that any changes in the participants' use of the informal register could be measured. This chapter details the setting of the intervention study and the participants who took part, as well as their teachers and the role of the researcher. It is followed by a discussion on task design and the activities which were provided to the Stage One participants as part of the intervention study. The chapter then describes the practical ethical considerations which were addressed as part of the study design. The process for data gathering, analysis, and tabulation is also discussed before describing the second stage of the fieldwork.

The second part of this chapter describes Stage Two of the fieldwork, which sought to assess the effect of the intervention study as perceived by speakers of English. It intended to provide insight into the most prominent linguistic features

when using the informal register. In this section, the role and recruitment of Stage Two participants is described, followed by the design of the questionnaire which they completed. Those ethical considerations which were different to the ethical considerations associated with Stage One are discussed in detail. The selection of data and methods for analysis are described before the chapter concludes with a summary.

Stage One: The intervention study

6.2 An intervention study with advanced ESOL learners

The intervention study took place over a period of three months, during which students planned to spend an hour per week on the intervention materials. All participants completed two assessment tasks and three language tasks, as outlined in section 6.4. Online interaction requires moderation, and a researcher therefore exercises some level of control. In this study, the researcher exercised control through task creation and moderation. Virtual online assessments supported the intervention project, but these did not form part of the selection criteria for participants: consequently, the researcher had no opportunity to influence the selection of participants.

6.3 Setting of the study

The school which took part in the intervention study will be referred to as School X, and is a small language school in the north of Spain, about 200km north of Madrid. The school was set up in 1992 to prepare students for Cambridge ESOL assessments, and class size ranges from four to eight students. The students of School X are all adults (i.e. over eighteen years of age) and mainly professionals; most students completed higher secondary level education. The aim of the school is to prepare students for an international working environment or university. The proprietor of the school is a member of Eurocall and has an interest in utilising educational technology in foreign language learning; the school had previously participated in other research projects, including the use of blogs in English instruction.

6.3.1 Stage One participants

Stage One participants were recruited to participate in the intervention study by the proprietor of the school, on behalf of the researcher. Fifteen students elected to join the intervention. The Stage One participants were studying part-time at School X in different foreign-language classes; most were either working or studying at university. All participants had a good knowledge of IT and many had used web tools such as blogs before. The precise demographic make-up and age range within the group is not available, which is one of the negative implications of this recruitment method. However, the tutor for the group described her students as: "university students and young professionals and

their levels range from B1 to C2". The participants' proficiency in English varied as outlined in Table 9 below: proficiency is assessed via use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), which students completed at the beginning of their course. A further self-assessment was administered in task 5, which included a multiple-choice quiz with a focus on the use of grammar and spelling. Not all participants completed this self-assessment, but the language proficiency range overall was similar to that indicated in Table 11. Whilst some students underestimated their ability, others overestimated their proficiency.

Table 11: English language proficiency level adapted from the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2011)

English language proficiency level	Number of participants
<p>C2 Mastery</p> <p>'Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.' (Council of Europe, 2011)</p>	10
<p>C1 Advanced</p> <p>'Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce, clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.' (Council of Europe, 2011)</p>	5

Participation in the project was outside the students' normal class time. They completed two assessment tasks and three language tasks on Ning. In most cases, the students accessed the materials once a week on Ning: the time spent completing the tasks varied significantly, from one hour to several hours per session.

6.3.2 Teachers

Only one teacher - the proprietor of School X - was involved in the study. The proprietor was activity involved at the start of the study, but after week 1 mainly monitored the intervention. Participants completed the study outside the

classroom, and the proprietor took the role of 'participant' to ensure that she could answer questions about the project in her classes.

The proprietor had herself completed a professional doctorate in Education, and thus was aware of the ethical considerations in this project: nevertheless, an online training session was arranged to support her in arranging the project for participants and obtaining informed consent. The session also covered ethical considerations; monitoring of the project; practical use of Ning, and data collection. It also introduced the next stage following the training session. The materials used in the training sessions are attached in Appendix V.

6.3.4 Role of the researcher in Stage One of the study

All students' and teachers' posts were monitored by the researcher throughout the project. Van Lier (1990 as quoted in Nunan 1992, p7) suggests that the extent to which the researcher is involved in a research project is central to its outcome. He suggests that when observing a classroom with students and teachers, the researcher has a low level of control, but is highly selective in their observation. Nunan (1992) argues that in practice it is not as simplistic as Van Lier claims, and that was certainly true of this study. Online interaction requires moderation, and the researcher therefore exercises some level of control. In this study, the researcher exercised control through task creation and moderation.

6.4 Task design and review

The aim of the learning materials in this study was to introduce features of the informal register. Several frameworks informed the task design as discussed in the literature review. The linguistic framework used was developed by Stubbs (1986, p19), which describes characteristics of the informal register, based upon tenor, field and mode. The traditional e-learning model used was based upon the work by (Salmon, 2002), the aim of which was to stimulate interaction during the intervention.

As discussed in the literature review, the use of the informal register is key to social interaction, which is a complex process, particularly in a conversational context, where the learner needs to make snap decisions as to what language is appropriate. The use of the informal register is generally included in elementary lessons, whilst advanced English lessons focus on formal language and aim to prepare the learners for work or academic study. This approach is reflected in the European Common reference levels, which stipulate that a basic user is

expected to use familiar, everyday expressions, and is able to introduce him/herself, whilst a proficient user: "can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes" (Council of Europe, 2011, n.p.). Unless the learner has acquired the vocabulary, level of formality, and features of informal conversations in each stage of their language class, however, they are unlikely to use the appropriate language: this could hamper their social interaction, and affect not only their career, but also their ability to socialise utilising the target language. Turner (2009, p64) suggests that the use of 'correct' grammar, punctuation and spelling (i.e. the use of formal language) can set people apart from the community. This is the reason why dedicated instruction of the informal register and its effect on the students' communicative interactions needs to be investigated, as outlined in the second research question.

The casual register is an element of the informal register and is used between friends (Joos, 1961), which is why some tasks in this study were designed to simulate conversations between friends. As discussed in Chapter 3, Heckman and Annabi (2006) found that online discussions actually increase synergy and the pooling of information, because students have more time to read and reread messages; this increases reflection time, and improves their responses. Interaction can be daunting: a key reason for selecting the use of social networking sites in this study was to provide Stage One participants with additional reflection time.

The linguistic and pedagogical reasons for the task design are described in this chapter. The aim and rationale for each task is outlined in more detail in the following section and the tasks themselves can be found in Appendix IX. An overview of the tasks and their purpose is provided in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Task topics and purpose of the intervention study

Week	Task	Purpose
Week 1	Initial assessment and familiarisation	This includes a listening, speaking, writing and reading element.
Week 2	Formality of language	This task introduces the differences between the formal and informal English register.
Week 3	Contractions.	This task revisits the use of contractions in the informal register

Week 4	Amplifiers, emphatics and vague language	This task introduces the use of amplifiers and emphatic language and their use in the informal register.
Week 5	Final assessment	This includes a listening, speaking, writing and reading element.

Turner (2009, p62) suggests that the setting of distinct communication situations could help learners to differentiate between the different types of language to be included; the researcher therefore elected to include different settings in the task design. For instance, Task 5 refers to communication on a social networking site, whilst Task 1 refers to email. The topics for instruction were based upon the features that identify the English informal register, as 'private verbs', 'that deletion', 'contractions' and 'present tense verbs' (Biber, 1995). Table 13 shows the chosen features as they occur the most frequently in the informal register.

Table 13: Features of casual register

Feature	Examples	Selection from table 6.1 co-occurring linguistic features of English Involved production (Biber, 1995)
That deletion	I think (that) I'll go	0.91
Contractions	'Won't' for 'will not'	0.90

Biber's (1995) research was based upon previous studies that identified sixtyseven linguistic features potentially important in English register variation.

Baker

(2010, p48) suggests that: "Biber's research on different registers within a language at a given point in time provides a fascinating way of making sense of linguistic variation, and makes good use of corpus linguistics' theoretical principles and methods." It would not have been practical to study all sixty-seven linguistic features, nor indeed relevant, as they are not all present in the informal register. Baker (2010, p26) states that: "keywords can be useful 'signposts' in that they identify the lexical focus or preoccupations of a corpus (or specific text) – although qualitative investigation of concordances is often required in order to identify exactly how keywords are being used". 'Contractions' have been adopted as a topic, whilst 'that deletion' has been merged with 'ellipsis' as, according to Pitt (2005, 129), this is one of the most salient grammatical features of conversation.

An introduction to formality and register types was included in task three. Finally, amplifiers and emphatic language were chosen as the last task, as: "these are largely associated with the informal register and can be relatively rare in academic texts" (Hinkel, 2005, p1064). Previous studies have shown that in academic texts, these features have been used disproportionately by non-native speakers (Hinkel, 2003a). Consequently, these features have been included in the intervention study, but for use in the informal register rather than the formal. In the second stage of the study, these features of the informal register were assessed based upon appropriateness for the context by speakers of English. The main aim of Stage Two was to establish whether these posts were perceived as appropriate for the context in which they were used.

The tasks were sequenced to ensure that students had time to familiarise themselves with Ning (Salmon, 2004) (Salmon, 2004) as outlined in Figure 7.

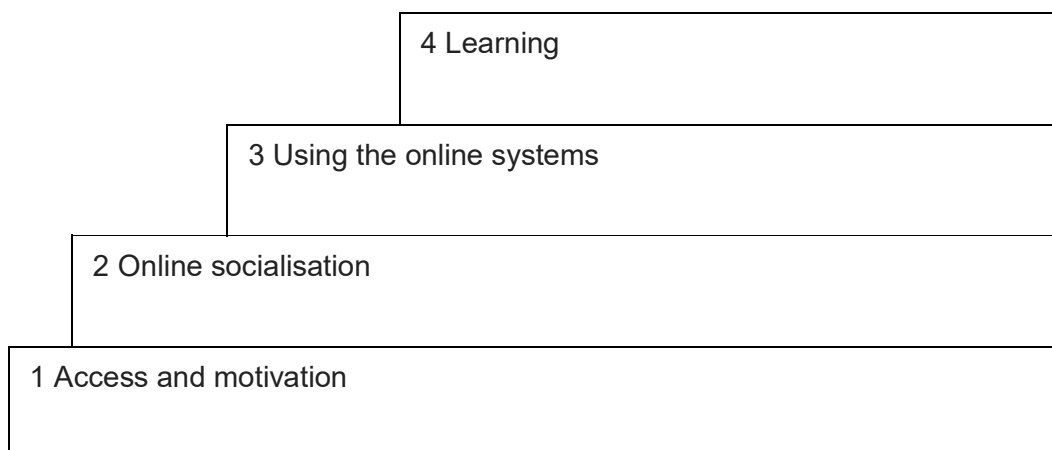


Figure 7: The S-Model for teaching and learning online, (adapted from Salmon 2004, p29)

The first week started with familiarisation tasks: learners set up their Ning profile and started to communicate with one another. The initial and final assessments were included in the task design to establish the effectiveness of the intervention project. Although the main focus of the intervention material was on application, rather than on grammar, metalanguage was introduced, based upon the premise that: "explicit presentation of linguistic items followed by controlled and free production practice leads to the ability to use the items in communication" (Shintani, 2013, p54).

All tasks were embedded within authentic materials, with linguistic features elicited, rather than taught explicitly. For instance, learners completed an activity and were then asked to explain what type of language they used and why. Explicit teaching would explain principles of the informal register first and then ask students to apply these. The decision to use elicitation rather than explicit

teaching is in line with the Sociocultural approach, in which language is taught for the purpose of establishing meaning (Leung and Creese, 2010, p97). The activities included as part of this project were designed to engage learners by using material that they would be able to access outside the classroom.

Tomlinson and Masuhara (2010, p323) found that so-called 'gap-fills' can aid the accuracy of specific grammar target forms, which is why they were included in the study. Gap-fills are text in which words are missing; these words can be provided at the bottom of the text, or omitted, depending on the level of the students. When students are presented with a text in which words are missing, they need to consider what word can be placed in the 'gap', by considering not only the meaning of the text, but also the grammar used in the sentence. Tomlinson and Masuhara (2010) demonstrated that this method improved the accuracy of students': "ability to use particular grammar forms". Finally, the use of pictures and videos promoted engagement but were also included in the tasks to generate discussion.

This design framework was the basis for the tasks described in this chapter. All learning activities utilised in Stage One of the study were created or curated by the researcher. The material for instruction was centred around features of the informal register, including contractions as identified by Biber (1995) but also amplifiers and emphatic language. Each final task included a free-writing exercise in both email and social networking format.

As a foreign-language teacher, the researcher undertook several courses in order to further develop her subject knowledge and skills but also enabled her to discuss elements of the task design with other practitioners. The researcher took part in the 'Teaching Literacy in Further Education' course and was invited to write a blog (displayed in

Figure 8) about this research project. The blog included a link to the tasks design and as an exercise in the 'Teaching Literacy in Further Education' course, these were reviewed by six ESOL and literacy practitioners.

Hi all,



Whilst you are reading this, I am attending a whole day team building session at Milton Keynes College. I'll let you know whether we all survived the exercise next week. Dangerous business – team building with chefs (and their knives)!

Sheila asked me to write a blog entry on social networking and in particular in relation to literacy. As some of you might know, I am in the first year of a part-time PhD programme at Oxford Brookes University. Although not entirely defined yet, it looks like my dissertation will provide a model to help other practitioners like you to encourage informal language in class through the use of social networking sites.

Background to the project

Although I love IT, I never have been too keen on social networking sites. I am not one for small talk, but as a previous sales executive, I do realise how important networking and socialising is for English as a Foreign Language Speakers (ESOL) students' future success, both in achieving a successful career as well as settling into the United Kingdom.

During my PGCE I joined a Facebook group that was set up by our class and found this very helpful. I then set up my own Facebook group for my ESOL classes and again had very positive responses from students. When I had to decide what project to undertake for my Masters in Education dissertation, my choice was already made: investigate the use of social networking sites in language teaching.

Now, I have simplified the research for the purpose of the blog, but you are more than welcome to read my MA dissertation and follow up the articles yourself. E-learning is based upon the theory of Vygotsky and is in line with social constructivist theories of learning where students learn from each other and activities are 'scaffolded' from low level to higher level to help students connect their current knowledge to the new learning.

If social networking sites are used in the classroom, they can help do just that: students interact with each other and learn from each other in their conversation. Most material used in classrooms is based upon text books, whilst this is authentic material generated by the students themselves. At first, students won't just start their chat on their own; the tutor will need to post discussion topics for students to reply to. Eventually, however students will start conversations themselves and have 'scaffolded' their learning.

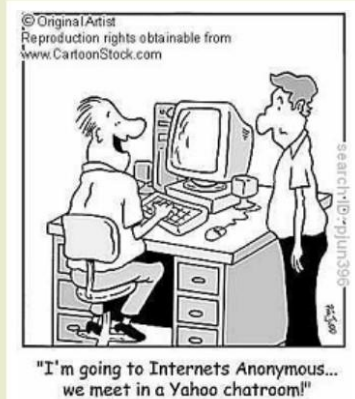


Figure 8: Lisette's literacy blog

No comments were provided on the blog, but the activities were discussed in class. Feedback from practitioners was mixed: one literacy teacher felt that there was no need to teach the informal register, but the majority view was that it served a useful purpose. Overall, feedback on the structure of the activities was positive, and enabled the researcher to make a few enhancements to the language used for instruction.

The aim and rationale for each task is outlined in more detail in the following section and the tasks themselves can be found in Appendix IX. The following section will also describe the pedagogical justifications for the types of exercises chosen and the topics that were selected to embed the learning material.

6.4.1 Initial self- assessment and familiarisation Aim

The aim of the self-assessment was to identify the general English proficiency level of the students and, in particular, their proficiency in using features of the English informal register. It also assessed whether the learners had an awareness of the features of the informal register. The aim of the familiarisation task was for learners to get used to the Ning platform and to start communicating with their peers in a social network setting in line with Stage One as defined by Salmon (2002).

Description

In the first week, all learners who participated in the project undertook an initial assessment. Ethical considerations meant that students who did not provide consent did not undertake this assessment, but were instead provided with alternative tasks. The initial assessment and the alternative tasks were available on Ning for learners to work through independently. The first part of the initial assessment tested whether the participants were aware of the differences between informal and formal language, and asked the learner to apply their knowledge of contractions and ellipses, and their awareness of the use of English informal language. Finally, it asked the learner to complete a free-writing exercise intended to be posted on the social networking site to see whether they applied their knowledge of the informal language in free writing.

6.4.2 Formality of language Aim

The aim of this task was to introduce and revise the differences between informal and formal English language, as well as the features that define these, in line with the structure that Turner (2009) proposes.

Description

The tasks started with a comparison between two situations that warrant the use of informal and formal language with the help of a visual representation of these situations. Session two focused on the appropriate use of language and elicited examples from the students as to when to use them. Task 2 in the session 2 highlighted the features that define informal language (Biber, 1995) and asked the students to link these to informal and formal language. The learners then completed their own sentences and provided peer feedback as to whether these

were formal or informal. The Ning website was used to pool information (Heckman and Annabi, 2006).

6.4.3 Contractions Aim

Session three focussed on revisiting the use of contractions, as these define the English informal register according to Biber (1995). Contractions are often avoided by English language learners, “probably due to the notion that formal writing is more suited to professional communication than informal writing” (Larocque, 2003). Although most learners would be familiar with the use of contractions, they might not necessarily be aware of the role they play in the use of the informal register, which is why they were included.

Description

The first task asked the learner to complete a ‘gap-fill’ exercise in the form of an informal letter and use of contractions. The use of gap fills can aid the accuracy of specific grammar target forms (Tomlinson and Masuhara, 2010). Students were then asked to convert non-contracted forms to contracted ones, and vice versa. In an effort to provide practice, students were also asked to correct the use of the apostrophe in Task 3. This then was linked to the use of informal language and spoken language. Students were asked to identify contractions in the spoken language and finally asked to use contractions in free writing.

6.4.4 Amplifiers, emphatics and vague language Aim

The aim for these exercises was to introduce students to the use of amplifiers, emphatics and vague language which is often used in the informal register (Hinkel, 2005).

Description

Task 1 was a matching activity that enabled students to identify those adjectives which featured emphatic language. Learners were then asked to apply this knowledge and to identify emphatic language from a spoken language clip. In Tasks 3 and 4, the language was applied in written form. The final exercise required students to create their own comic strip, and to use emphatic language in this.

6.4.5 Final assessment Aim

The aim of the final assessment was to identify the proficiency level of the students using features of the English informal register.

Description

The design for the final assessment was identical to the initial assessments, in order to ensure that the differences in proficiency could be attributed to the intervention project.

6.5 Selecting a social media site

Challenges associated with social networking sites such as privacy and data protection, and considerations such as the private versus the professional sphere, as outlined in the literature review, played a role in selecting a social media tool. Each tool has its own advantages and disadvantages as outlined in Appendix II. The benefits of asynchronous communication have been outlined in the literature review, but are of particular relevance to this study as the participants are likely to face difficulties with listening and pronunciation (Kingsley, 2011; Serrano and Miralpeix, 2013), suggesting that a scaffolded approach might support the participants in the intervention study.

Ning was selected mainly to address the challenges associated with data privacy. As Ning functioned as a closed network, it was used only for the purpose of this study. Closed networks can only be accessed by invited members, which meant that data was only available to learners in the group. It had the same affordances as any social networking site, encouraging a collaborative community. Furthermore, Ning has been widely used for educational purposes (Dixon, 2012).

6.6 Ethical considerations for Stage One

This project adhered to the ethical guidelines set by Oxford Brookes University and was approved by the research ethics committee of the university. In addition to adhering to these guidelines, the research design was scrutinised by the researcher and the supervising team.

Participants took part in the intervention study outside their normal timetabled lessons and were recruited by their teacher. Their teacher was the school's proprietor, who responded to an email notification from the researcher to all Eurocall members. The owner arranged permission to take part on behalf of the language school, and explained the intervention to the learners, using the materials provided by the researcher. Participants also received participant information sheets. Learners gave consent by completing consent forms and these were forwarded to the researcher, prior to the start of the study.

It was anticipated that the Ning project would give students the ability to practice the use of informal language, whilst also providing them with an increased awareness of safety implications when using social networking sites. This was an example of benefit to research participants arising from taking part in the study.

6.7 Tabulation of Stage One

All posts were tagged using a combined method, which included the results of two linguistic taggers, followed by a manual tagging procedure. The tagged posts are included in Appendix VIII Manual post tagging. The first post is included in Figure 9 on page 110 as an example to explain the method used.

As a first step, both automatic taggers were used, which tagged features of the informal register such as contractions, informal nouns. The automatic taggers could not accurately tag the use of punctuation. As punctuation is used in all registers, it was important to identify only the type of punctuation used in the informal register, which could only be done manually.

As three tagging methods were used, it was very important not to double-count any of the features identified. For instance, if contractions are counted as a feature, the apostrophes used in these should not be calculated in addition as punctuation. For these reasons exclamation marks were counted as a separate feature.

Emphatic language was tagged in MAT, but was also included in the manual tagging method. Emphatic language uses intensifiers to give emphasis to the message: "Intensification is employed as a linguistic resource to convey a message more clearly and to strengthen the speakers' position as well as their attitude towards what they are saying" (Núñez Pertejo and Palacios Martínez,

2014, p212). This suggests that analysing this type of language can be subjective, as it is debatable which words do provide emphasis to a sentence, or convey a strong feeling. To address this, the MAT tagging data was used as a basis, followed by a manual correction, which was also reviewed by a fellow teacher.

Abbreviations were included in the manual tagging method, as these appear frequently in informal text. Even though contractions are often abbreviations of first person pronouns and verbs, the researcher felt that it was important to separate these features to keep in line with the method used by (Biber, 1995).

<p>Yes, of course! But ping-pong isn't my point, you know! strong</p> <p>Anyway, why don't we go for a Beyond Retro? And after that, let's go at Loungelover, they have terrific drinks. it's really close to http://www.timeout.com/london/retro http://www.timeout.com/london/t-pubs/loungelover-e1</p> <p>See you!</p>	Manual tagged	Count
	Contractions	4
	Emphatic language	4
	Exclamation marks	4
	Informal nouns	1
	Abbreviations	1
	Total	14
	Features per word count	18%

Figure 9: Example of manual tagging

Only the free writing assessment posting data from Stage One were analysed this way, as the other posting data mainly responded to the tasks set by the researcher.

To sum up, data was generated in Stage One by the participants in the tasks and on Ning. Fifteen participants completed the intervention study and submitted tasks throughout the study, which were analysed using two linguistic taggers, followed by manual amendments where necessary.

6.8 Data Analysis Stage One

This section explains and justifies the choices made to analyse the data collected in Stage One. It compares the use of two automatic linguistic taggers with a manual coding process and explains why a combination of methods was used. Statistical analysis was required to validate the findings and ensure that these could be contributed to the learning materials introduced in the intervention study. The methods used for statistical analysis and their justification are explained in the next section.

6.8.1 Tagging of linguistic features using automatic and manual taggers To analyse the text provided pre- and post-intervention, two types of automatic taggers were used. Neither captured all the features included in the posts, which is why manual tagging was also undertaken. The main advantage of using an automatic tagger was to produce a reliable and consistent approach. Automation of the coding process, provided by a linguistic tagger, assured that all posts were analysed in the same manner, which reduced the scope for error and bias. Clearly, mistakes can still be made, as a linguistic tagger is only as accurate as the corpus that has 'trained' it. Therefore, all posts were first automatically tagged using MAT: tagged again using CLAWS, and finally were manually adjusted, in order to increase accuracy still further.

Many studies use automatic taggers to save time. This was not the reason in this study as the volume of posting data was relatively small. In fact, due to the need to clean the posting data meticulously before feeding it in to the linguistic tagger, automatic tagging took more time than manual coding. A disadvantage of coding the data using a linguistic tagger, is the fact that the data-coding process is not transparent. This lack of transparency makes it difficult for the researcher, to verify the results, unless the data is also coded manually. Another key disadvantage of using linguistic taggers is that they can only code the features that have been identified in their design and training. Manual coding allows the researcher to identify patterns that a linguistic tagger has not been configured to determine. As stated earlier, linguistic taggers are limited in the sense that they are based upon the corpus in which they are trained: as a result, neither tagging system replicated all the features used in the study. To increase accuracy in the tagging process, a manual tagging system was introduced. This used primary colours to highlight the tagging codes, and is a method which ensures that

tagging codes are visually represented, allowing the researcher very quickly to analyse the number of different tags and tagging patterns within the text.

The CLAWS Tagger was the first automatic tagger to be used in analysing the data. As a first step, the posting data were cleaned, the hyperlinks and automatically generated information (person posting, date stamp) were removed before importing the data into CLAWS. The tagged text was then entered into a word-frequency macro in order to find the tags that occurred most. Chapter 7 reveals the findings from the use of the CLAWS tagger, which are discussed in Chapter 8. The limitations associated with the use of automatic taggers are also outlined in Chapter 8.

Figure 10 shows the frequency of the occurrences of first and second-person pronouns, contractions and present tense verbs in the posting data before and after the intervention, using the CLAWS linguistic tagger. The graph shows these four features because they were the ones most commonly found in the text, and were also of interest as they are features used more frequently in informal language. Other features such as the base form of verbs were also found frequently, for instance 'be', but these were not reported as they occur in other registers frequently too.

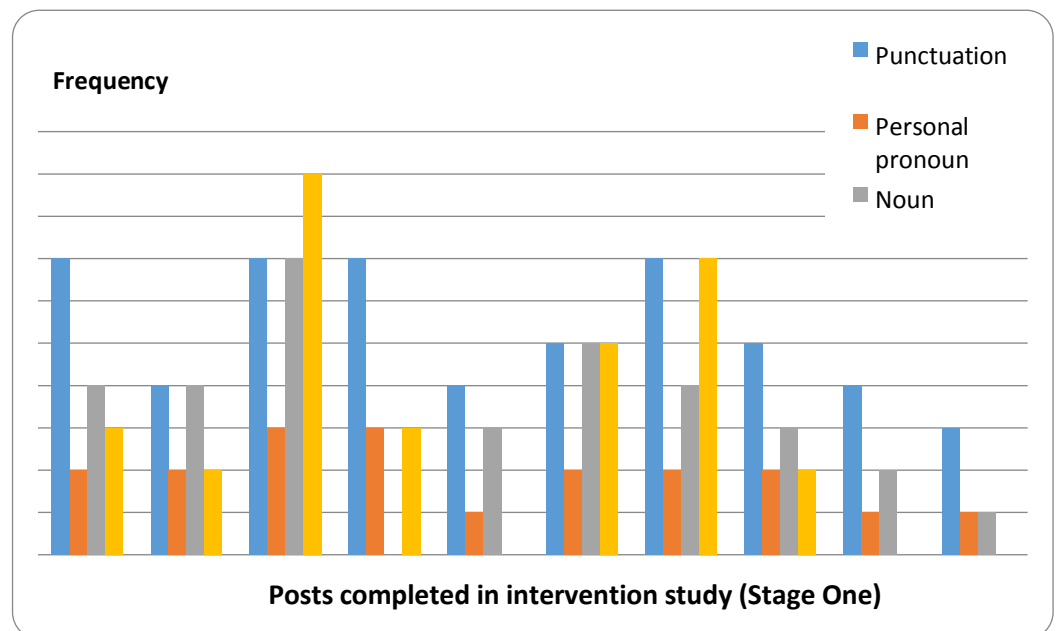


Figure 10: Features pre- and post-intervention (CLAWS)

At first glance, the features apparent in the text are clearly linked to the informal register. For instance, Figure 10 shows contractions in five of the ten assessments. However, this method of tagging did not provide a complete

representation of the features that were present in the posting data as emphatic language was not tagged by the automatic tagger. Even though the exclamation marks were recognised by the automatic tagger, the system tagged this just as punctuation and was not able to identify it as a feature of the informal register.

The choice of Multidimensional Analysis Tagger (MAT) developed by Nini (2014). was based upon its design, as it replicated the tagging method that Biber (1995) used in his initial analysis of the informal register. To ensure that the outcome of the automatic tagger included the features identified by Biber (1995), which were the focus of the study, this second tagger was used. This tagger does recognise emphatic language, but it is not reported here because it was only tagged in two of the posts. Before feeding the data through the MAT tagger, it was cleaned by removing the hyperlinks and automatically generated posting data. The text files were then tagged and the tagged data were used for analysis with a word frequency macro. As a result, the features that occurred most in the posting data remained and are reported here. The graph below provides a visual representation of the four most common features that appeared in the posting data, according to MAT analysis.

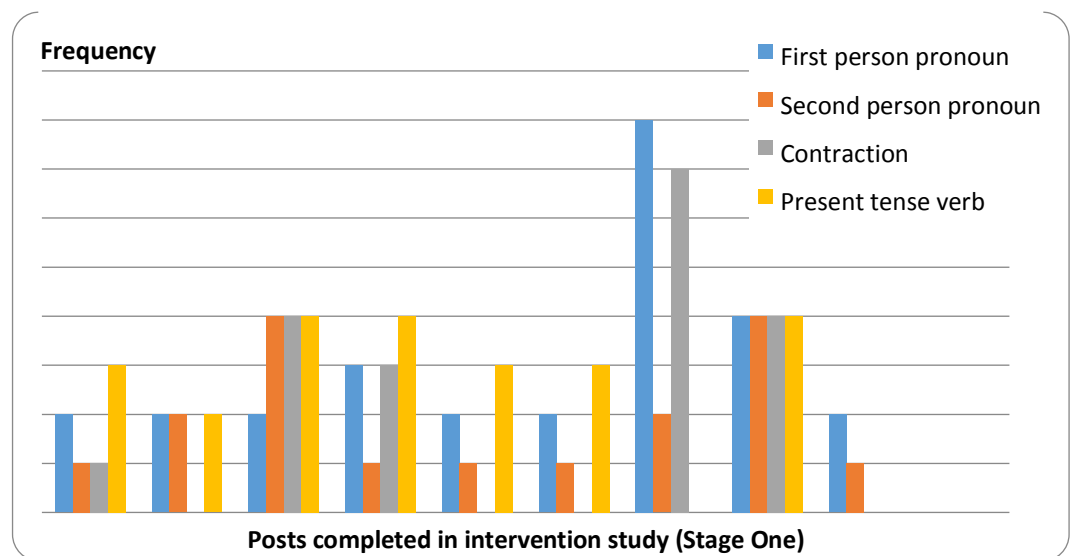


Figure 11: Features pre- and post-intervention (MAT)

Figure 11 shows that the four most used features of the informal language found in the posts tagged through MAT were first person and second person pronouns, contractions and present tense verbs. As the figure shows, there is no increase in the frequency of the individual features studied after the intervention project.

Even though MAT has been analysing web corpora with accuracy and has been developed to place the text in a particular dimension (by ascertaining the type of text based upon the features analysed), not all linguistic features that play a role in informal language were tagged accordingly. For instance, MAT does not include all emphatics, even though it was designed to analyse the features based upon Biber (1995) and they were included in Biber's original analysis. As a result, a manual tagging system was employed that combined the features from both automatic tagging systems, and also included the missing features.

6.8.2 Attributing the effect of the intervention study through linguistic analysis

The findings of a research study cannot necessarily be attributed to that study, as these can also take place as a result of chance. Statistical analysis is undertaken to check whether the research findings can be attributed to the intervention study or whether they could be a chance occurrence. The paired sample t-test, used for this purpose, is a statistical procedure used to determine whether the mean difference between two sets of observations, in this case preintervention and post-intervention is zero, in which case the observations would have been a random occurrence. In a paired sample t-test, each subject or entity is measured twice, resulting in pairs of observations. The same participants took part in both the initial and final assessment post, so they were one population or in terms of statistics a paired sample. If the "value of p is less than 0.5 we can conclude that there was a significant difference between the means of these samples" (Field, 2009. p385). The results of the statistical tests undertaken are reported, where relevant, in chapter 7.

Stage Two: Evaluative survey with speakers of English

The aim of Stage Two was to analyse the Stage One participants' posts from a sociolinguistic perspective, by asking speakers of English to rate them. The posts generated in Stage One were used to design a questionnaire which was administered to speakers of English, also referred to as Stage Two of the fieldwork. Stage One of the study took place between January and March 2013, whilst Stage Two took place the following year, in November 2014.

The aims of the second stage were:

- to assess the effectiveness of the intervention as perceived by speakers of English
- to identify the register features which contributed to the perceptions of the speakers of English.

6.9 The role of Stage Two participants

The questionnaire, generated from the assessment posts produced by the Stage One participants, was distributed to ninety students ($x=90$, $n=50$). These students undertook a teacher training course at a Further Education college in the south of England. This was important, as the intervention study focused on use of the British English informal register. The location of the study was crucial, as English register features vary in other English-speaking countries such as Australia and the United States of America. Stage Two participants were all speakers of English and had all completed a level 2 English qualification, prior to taking part in the study, which is equivalent to C2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The participants in Stage Two of the study were representative of the participant group selected for Stage One, in so much that they were also adults, students but also professionals. Trainee teachers in further education enter education as a second or third career following work in industry or public services (Rogers, 2011), which allows them to be classed as professionals and trainee teachers. An invitation to take part in the study was sent to all students undertaking a Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at the college, who were distributed across six classes. In addition to two classes of first year and second

year students, the college also has two classes of intensive PGCE students, who complete their teacher training in one year, rather than the traditional two-year qualification.

6.10 Questionnaire design

To investigate key patterns in the intervention, Stage Two participants were asked to complete a questionnaire which contained the exact texts created during the initial and final assessments in Stage One. Although the initial results from Stage One indicated that the intervention had increased the use of the informal register, the second part of the research aimed to investigate whether the use of informal register features impacted upon the perception of the Speakers of English. The Stage Two participants were asked to score the text of each post on a five-point Likert scale:

- 1) Incorrect use of language,
- 2) Not appropriate use for the context provided,
- 3) Not sure,
- 4) Correct use, but I would not use it this way and
- 5) Appropriate for the context.

The aim was to match the perceptions of speakers of English with any differences in perceived-context appropriateness pre- to post-intervention. The questionnaire also asked the participants to comment on each of the questions by identifying particular words which helped them to make their decision in assigning a score.

The Stage Two participants first completed basic demographic information to provide context for the data analysis. Linguistic features within a community are defined by sociolinguistic factors such as social class, age, gender, and language register and style (Holmes, Meyerhoff and Romaine, 2003), which means that sub-groups within a community might use different linguistic features or perceive these in different ways. In light of this, the questionnaire included questions relating to age and gender, in order to determine the possible effects on linguistic judgements (Lasagabaster, Cots and Mancho-Barés, 2013). Questions regarding bilingualism and the proficiency of participants in English were also included. The main purpose of including these was to compare the

results of the bilingual participants to those of participants who only spoke English. It was also important to identify speakers of Spanish in the results, as they share a common native language with the Stage One participants who produced the posts, and might well consider these posts more appropriate than those participants who do not speak Spanish. Questions relating to social class were not included as this is a complex area of study which did not fall within the scope of this study.

Out of the available data, the choice was made to include the social networking posts collected in the intervention study as this medium was used. This meant that ten sets of data were available to be selected for the Stage Two questionnaire. To keep the questionnaire length to an acceptable standard and to avoid bias, the posts for five Stage One participants were selected randomly.

The students completed their posts as part of the intervention, as indicated in Figure 12.

Respond to your friend and suggest two other attractions that you would like explore whilst in London.

Type here what you would post on the social networking site:

Hi,

Great idea, playing ping pong, but you know I'm a bit clumsy! We'd better go to the London Eye (you only have to seat there and enjoy the views). Later on we can go to the Tate Modern Gallery, it's not far and we'll surely laugh about the works in there!

Figure 12 Completed post by Stage One participant

A selection of these posts was then reproduced as part of the questionnaire, as indicated in Figure 13 below.

17. Great idea, playing ping pong, but you know I'm a bit clumsy! We'd better go to the London Eye (you only have to seat there and enjoy the views). Later on we can go to the Tate Modern Gallery, it's not far and we'll surely laugh about the works in there!

- Incorrect use of language
- Not appropriate use for the context provided
- Not sure
- Correct use, but I would not use it this way
- Appropriate for the context

18. Why did you rate the previous question as you did? Which elements of the text helped you in making that decision?

Figure 13 Use of the completed posts in Stage Two questionnaire

Bias could occur if the researcher would had selected the posts from the students that seemed to make more or less progress, so external validity was enhanced through random selection. To produce the questionnaires, five sets of tasks were selected, which equated to 50% of the data. By using 50% of the available material, the questionnaire length was contained to thirty questions. The first ten questions of the questionnaire asked the participants for consent and demographic data, after which twenty questions relating to the use of the informal register were included. The researcher acknowledges that the questionnaire was still relatively long, covering eight pages of text. Most questionnaires are kept to a lower number of pages, often only one double side of A4, to achieve a high response rate. However, reducing the questionnaire length further was not practical in this study as an explanation of the study and questions relating to consent also needed to be included, in order to adhere to ethical standards (Oliver, 2010).

6.11 Questionnaire delivery and completion

In total, 99 students enrolled on the PGCE at the college, but only 90 of these students were present at the sessions. Students who did not attend could still participate but, in the event, no additional students took the opportunity. 53 questionnaires were completed, which represents a completion rate of 59%. Three questionnaires were not used, as the consent sections were either not

completed, or consent had not been provided. In total, 50 questionnaires were used for analysis (n=50); a completion rate of 55%.

The researcher was present for practical reasons, in four of the six classes. To ensure that participants had sufficient information about the study, the researcher provided their teachers with a video. The researcher also provided an email address in case students wanted to ask questions. Technical issues prevented the video being played at the 26/11/14 session: the class teacher instead outlined the study design to the participants, and distributed the participation information sheets.

Table 14 provides an overview of the information provided, the class and whether the researcher was present.

Table 14: Survey guidance

Class	Guidance provided	Researcher present
First year students	Presentation and participation information	Yes
First year students	Presentation and participation information	Yes
Intensive students	Presentation and participation information	Yes
Intensive students	Video of presentation and participation information	No
Second year students	Participation information	No
Second year students	Presentation and participation information	Yes

In the other sessions, the researcher provided a short presentation for the prospective Stage Two participants, outlining the study's intentions, information about participation in the study and the ethical procedures relating to consent, before distributing the questionnaires.

6.12 Ethical considerations for Stage Two

Like the Stage One intervention study, Stage Two of the fieldwork also adhered to the ethical guidelines set by Oxford Brookes University and was approved by the research ethics committee of the university. Participants had the choice either to complete the questionnaires during the guest-speaker session, or to

take the questionnaire home for completion, and return it to a box at the college, for collection by the researcher. The choice to complete the questionnaire either in the classroom or at home was introduced to ensure that students did not feel pressured to complete the survey. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the trainee teachers. The researcher also provided a short presentation which gave an overview of the study design. Participants also received participant information sheets. Stage Two participants gave their consent to participate in the study, by completing consent forms embedded in the questionnaires. The guest lecture was of relevance to the trainee teachers as research is part of the curriculum offered to them. It was therefore anticipated that the Ning project would give the trainee teachers an opportunity to start thinking about their own research projects as a result. This was an example of a benefit to research participants, arising from their involvement in the study.

6.13 Data Selection Stage Two

Data was generated in Stage One by the participants in the intervention study. Fifteen participants completed the learning materials supplied as part of the intervention study and submitted tasks throughout the five weeks of the project. As the purpose of the study was to analyse the posting data, with the help of the views of Stage Two participants, a selection had to be made. If all posting data had been utilised, the questionnaire for Stage Two participants would have been too long. As a result, data produced by five participants in Stage One was randomly selected used to produce the questionnaire in Stage Two. Random selection took place to ensure that no selection bias would occur.

6.14 Data Analysis Stage Two

The questionnaires were manually analysed and the answers were transferred into a spreadsheet. The answer options were rated as 1 (incorrect use of language) to 5 (appropriate for the context used). The text in the open comments was analysed using a word-frequency macro, which was created in Excel by colleagues at the Institute of Education at the Open University.

The responses were initially coded 1 to 5, but it was subsequently decided to use colour-coding in order to better visually analyse emerging patterns in the responses. No software was available in order to create this visualisation; thus it was manually created in MS Excel by the researcher. This visualisation is displayed in Chapter 10 and shows that patterns emerge (horizontally in the

figure) which would have been difficult to spot in tabular format. The findings relating to the survey are reported in Chapter 7 and discussed in Chapter 10.

6.15 Summary

This chapter describes the fieldwork approach undertaken in this study. It first provides an overview of the work, and then describes the activities, methods and analysis undertaken in each of the two stages. Stage One of the intervention study took place in a language school in Spain, recruited through a call for participants: students were given the opportunity to participate by their teacher. These students, referred to as Stage One participants, undertook five tasks delivered via a social networking site. These tasks covered features of the informal register, including stages of formality, contractions, amplifiers and emphatic language. The aim and detailed description of each task in the intervention study are included in the Appendices. An assessment task was completed both at the beginning and end of the study. In week 5, which represented the end of the study, an assessment task was undertaken in which participants were asked to respond to an entry posted on a social networking site. The responses to this assessment were used to create a questionnaire. This questionnaire - Stage Two of the study - was then distributed to students undertaking a PGCE qualification in a college in the south of England. The recruitment process and the professional background of Stage Two participants is also included in this chapter. Ethical considerations relating to both Stage One and Stage Two participants, were discussed. The chapter concludes with a justification of the data collection and analysis methods used for the study.

Chapter 7 Findings:

The effects of instruction in the informal register on usage and perceived context appropriateness

7.1 Introduction

In this study, a social networking site was utilised to investigate the impact of dedicated instruction upon the use of informal-register features by foreignlanguage learners. The impact of the intervention study was evaluated via two methods: (i) analysis of linguistic features and (ii) perceptions of speakers of English.

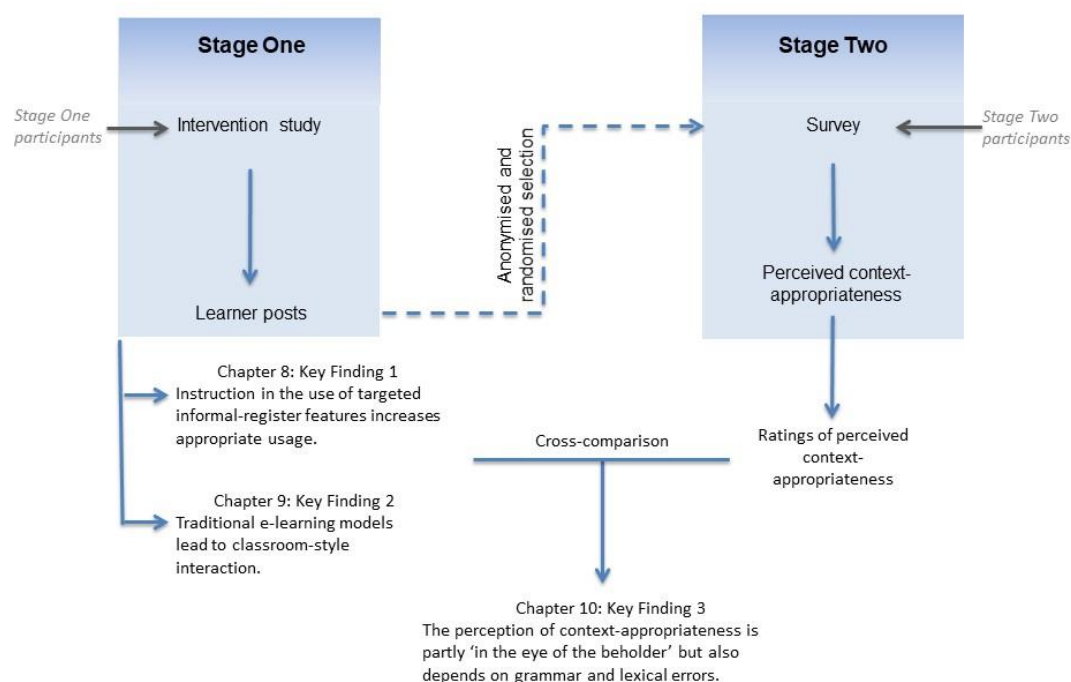


Figure 14: Key findings in Stage One and Two

This short chapter outlines succinctly, the findings for both phases of the study as displayed in Figure 14. The first two findings relate to Stage One, in which dedicated instruction of the informal-register took place. Key finding three relates to Stage Two, in which the questionnaires produced in Stage One were rated by speakers of English upon perceived context appropriateness.

Regarding the first aim, the data revealed that the occurrence of informal-register features in posts produced by students increased after the intervention study. Linguistic analysis of the register present in the posts (contractions, emphatic language, exclamation marks, informal nouns and abbreviations), showed that the degree to which the informal-register features occurred, increased not only on average across all participants, but also for each individual Stage One participant.

The second aim of the study was to generate peer-to-peer interaction. With a few exceptions, social network analysis showed that interaction in this study was principally teacher-to-student, rather than peer-to-peer, with interactions between peers and teacher closely resembling those found in a traditional foreignlanguage classroom, with the teacher at the centre.

The third aim of the study, related to Stage Two, was to compare the responses of speakers of English with the linguistic analysis undertaken in Stage One. No relationship was found between the frequency of informal-register features in the posts when compared to the responses by the English speakers. The rating of the responses by the speakers of English is referred to as 'context-perceived appropriateness'. These ratings were colour-coded and displayed visually in a 'heat map', which showed that context-perceived appropriateness was linked to Stage Two individual characteristics, rather than the informal-register features produced by Stage One participants. A highly significant negative correlation was found between age and perceived context-appropriateness was found (Paired Sample correlation = -0.816 and $p=0.221$), as discussed in chapter Ten. To explain these findings, the responses of sub-groups within the Stage Two participant population were considered, with analysis of the responses of the Spanish speakers revealing that these differed from the rest of the group. This lack of correlation between linguistic features and perceived contextappropriateness essentially contradicts the literature reviewed in this study, which suggests that linguistic features, such as the informal-register, define degrees of formality.

7.2 Stage One, Key Finding 1: Instruction in the use of targeted linguistic features of the informal-register increases appropriate usage

The linguistic analysis of all fifteen posts showed that, post-intervention, the average occurrence of the informal features increased, viz: prior to the

intervention, students used twenty informal-register features per hundred words; post-intervention, this increased to thirty-three. Unexpectedly, the number of words in the students' posts decreased post-intervention. This reduction indicates that students developed not merely an awareness of, but in fact an ability to use appropriately, the informal-register features: this will be discussed further in chapter eight.

After analysing the findings for these fifteen participants, the focus turned to the individual performance of five randomly selected participants. The impact of the intervention study is evident, as the frequency of the informal-register features increased for all five participants post-intervention, which was in line with the results for the entire sample. Appropriate use of the informal-register features increased considerably for most of the five participants, with two of the participants composing posts in which appeared 50% of the informal-register features.

To attribute these findings to the intervention study, a paired sample t-test was undertaken to establish whether these findings were random or significant: as p was found to be 0.039, it could thus be concluded that the findings were significant, and could be attributed to the effect of the intervention.

The data analysis also highlighted that the distribution of the informal-register features was not balanced in the posts ($n=5$) pre- or post-intervention. The most frequently used informal-register features present, listed in order of frequency, were: (i) exclamation marks, (ii) contractions, (iii) emphatic language, (iv) informal nouns and (v) abbreviations. This finding corroborates Biber's (1995) suggestion that contractions occur most frequently in informal language. Furthermore, this study found that, in addition to contractions, emphatic language and exclamation marks were also used frequently. To investigate whether the use of these features was interrelated, a correlation analysis was undertaken. A correlation might have been expected between emphatic language and exclamation marks, which would have explained their frequency. However, a correlation was found between the use of contractions and the use of emphatic language, but not between any of the other features (contractions, emphatic language, exclamation marks, informal nouns and abbreviations).

The next section considers those findings relevant to communicative interaction during the intervention study.

7.3 Stage One, Key Finding 2: Traditional e-learning models stimulates traditional classroom interaction rather than peer-to-peer learning

Salmon's (2004) traditional e-learning model informed the task design, with the aim of stimulating peer-to-peer interaction. Peer interaction was deemed important in order to provide an authentic setting for Stage One participants using the informal register. Activity on the social networking site was measured for each of the stages in the intervention study: socialisation (week one), content delivery (weeks two to four) and practice (week five). Learner interaction was measured in two ways: (i) peer interaction and (ii) engagement. Analysis of peer interaction was measured by the 'friendships' created and communication between peers, whilst analysis of engagement was measured through activity on the social networking site. 'Friendship' in this context describes peer-to-peer invitations to 'connect', once participants became 'friends', the social networking site automatically highlighted posts from these participants.

Unexpectedly, analysis of peer-interaction revealed that not all participants engaged in this type of behaviour: despite the familiarisation stage, only four participants connected to another participant as a 'friend', with all these connections occurring in the first week of the study. It could be that participants were already familiar with one another, which is discussed in Chapter 8. Furthermore, only seven of the fifteen respondents instigated interactions of any kind, with other participants.

The formation of relationships was crucial to stimulate authentic use of the informal-register. Those students who did not connect to any peers interacted only with the researcher: this was an unexpected finding as, in a typical social networking site, participants enjoy some kind of relationship with their peers. Furthermore, many participants are central to the network (Karampelas, 2012), this means that they are connected to many other participants. The analysis of interactions shows that the only individual central to the network in the study was the researcher, as discussed in chapter nine.

As was the case for peer interaction, engagement also increased in the familiarisation stage. In week one of the study, activity on Ning showed that

participation increased. This increase in engagement occurred once participants had signed up and chosen their avatar. This was an expected finding as, in line with traditional e-learning models, socialisation was embedded in the week's task design. Analysis of engagement showed that it was still increasing when the socialisation stage ended, which was unsurprising as not all participants completed the study at the same period within the week.

Contrary to expectation, analysis of the activity measured on Ning in the content delivery and practice stages showed that engagement decreased in both stages. Even though participants responded throughout the intervention to the tasks set, peaks in engagement occurred in the socialisation stage, and in week three of the content delivery phase. Conversely, the increased engagement in week three was expected, as it occurred when participants engaged in a discussion task; this task was, in fact, deliberately set up to stimulate peer-interaction and engagement. However, once the task was complete, engagement declined and was almost non-existent by the end of the study. The lowest levels of engagement were measured during the practice element of the study. Completion of tasks also decreased over the five-week period, with fourteen completed tasks received in the first week, as opposed to only ten in the last.

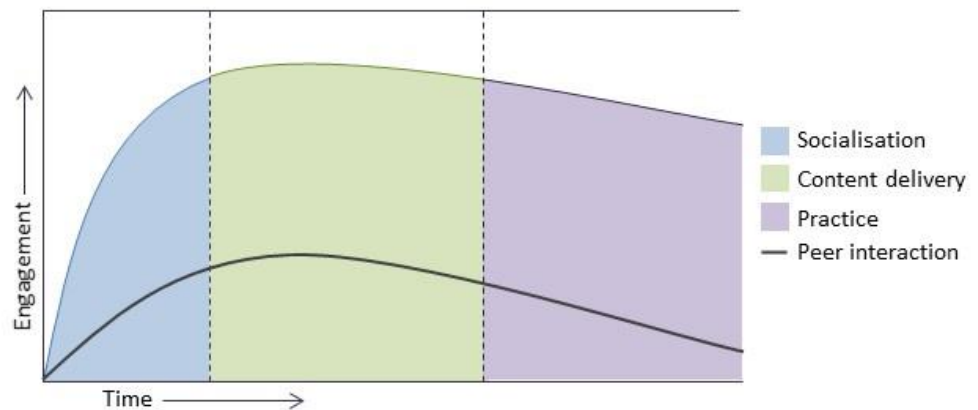


Figure 15: Decline of engagement and peer-interaction on Ning throughout the intervention

In order to explain these unexpected findings regarding peer-to-peer interaction and engagement, a fine-grained Learning Design analysis (Rienties and Toetel, 2016; Rienties, Toetel and Bryan, 2015; Toetel and Rienties, 2016) was undertaken. The Learning Design analysis showed that the actual design of the intervention tasks differed from the intended design. In particular, analysis revealed that the tasks undertaken by students focussed more on 'finding and handling information' and 'assessment' tasks than initially intended,

whilst students actually spent less time on communication and simulation activities, as discussed in Chapter 9.

7.4 Stage Two, Key Finding 3: The perception of context appropriateness is based on sociolinguistic rather than linguistic features

The responses of the speakers of English were counted and analysed based upon the Likert rating provided. The sum of the ratings of the speakers of English is referred to as 'perceived-context appropriateness'. Analysis of perceived context-appropriateness showed that 'appropriate for the context' was the most common response selected for each of the questions. Unexpectedly, perceived context-appropriateness did not increase post-intervention, with the incidence of the 'appropriate for the context' response in fact decreasing from 52% to 50%.

Stage Two participants stated that they rated the posts based upon linguistic features (linguistic context, grammar and lexical mistakes), as indicated by a word frequency analysis of the open-comment questionnaire data. The linguistic informal-register features found in the posts were then compared by the researcher to perceived context-appropriateness in four ways:

1. For each individual post, pre- and post-intervention
2. Weighed individual posts, pre- and post-intervention
3. Average features present in all posts, pre- and post-intervention
4. Register types by category, pre- and post-intervention

No significant correlation was found in any of these analyses. This is an important finding as it shows there is no relationship between the ratings given by the speakers of English, and the informal-register features present in the posts.

In a further attempt to explain perceived context appropriateness, the 'least appropriate' and 'most appropriate' posts were analysed. These suggested that grammar and lexical mistakes have an impact upon perceived context appropriateness as evaluated by the Stage Two speakers of English.

Based upon this important finding, the self-assessed language level of the students was compared to the perceived context appropriateness.

Unsurprisingly, Stage One participants with a lower level of English received lower ratings; this finding is explained by the relationship between the incidence of grammatical and lexical mistakes made by English learners, and their level of English speaking (Council of Europe, 2011). Features identified in the 'most appropriate' posts were also found in other posts with lower ratings, and could thus not explain perceived context appropriateness.

The heat map of perceived context appropriateness, and the statistically significant association between the survey questions themselves, illustrated that context-perceived appropriateness is linked to the sociolinguistic characteristics of the English speakers themselves. The responses of the Spanish speakers differed from those of the other subjects. Stage Two participants were all trainee teachers and, in each instance, it was noted by the researcher that the nature of the subject taught had some impact upon the response.

The findings in this section bring to light the fact that, although the English speakers believed their ratings were based largely upon linguistic factors (linguistic context, grammar and lexical mistakes), in reality these decisions were driven by sociolinguistic factors.

7.5 Summary

In Stage One, use of the informal register increased after the intervention study and the informal-register features were also used more appropriately. In Stage Two, no relationship was identified between the perception of context appropriateness and the targeted linguistic features, but analysis indicated that the sociolinguistic make-up of the Stage Two participant group influenced perceived context appropriateness.

The three main findings summarised in this chapter, then, are:

- Instruction in the use of targeted linguistic features of the informal-register increases appropriate usage;
- Salmon's (2004) traditional e-learning model stimulates traditional classroom interaction rather than peer-to-peer learning;

- Stage Two participants' social and linguistic background informed their perception of context appropriateness rather than the informal-register features found in Stage One posts.

The three chapters that follow will consider each of these findings in detail, with the implications for further academic research, educational practice and policy development, also discussed Chapters 8, 9 and 10.

Chapter 8 Discussion of Stage: Increase in targeted linguistic features postintervention

8.1 Introduction

This is the first of three discussion chapters to examine the three key findings outlined in Chapter 7. The purpose of this chapter is to answer research question 1: How did students use the targeted features of the informal language, as measured at the beginning and end of the intervention study? This chapter discusses the implications of Key Finding 1: the increase in informal-register features identified post-intervention. Key Findings 2 and 3 are discussed in Chapters 9 and 10, respectively. See Figure 16 for an overview of these chapters and their content.

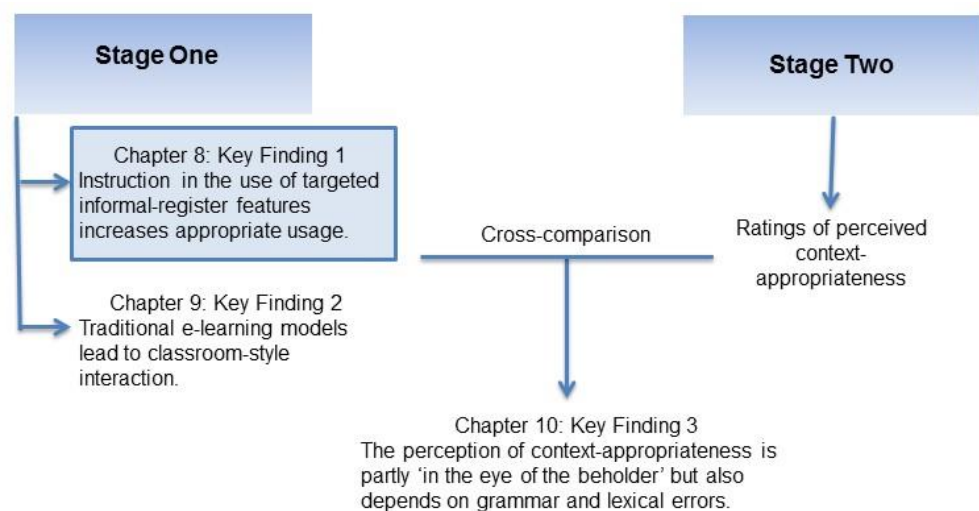


Figure 16: Key Finding 1: increase in appropriate register usage

This is, to the researcher's knowledge, one of the first studies to examine dedicated instruction in the use of the informal register, delivered on a social

networking site. The results are significant as they provide empirical data which identifies the impact of the instruction of the informal register in foreign-language learning. This chapter argues that the increase in informal-register features postintervention can be attributed to the learning materials provided as part of the intervention study.

This chapter is divided into six main sections. In the first section, the increase in informal-register features post-intervention is discussed in detail. The second section considers whether this increase can be attributed to the learning materials by exploring (i) content, (ii) task design, (iii) instruction methods, and (iv) resources. In the third section, it is argued that the reduced word count postintervention may be partly explained by mastery of informal-register use or by student motivation. In the fourth section, the findings reveal that the language found in this study does not correspond fully to oral communication or Netspeak. The idiosyncrasies of learning English using social media imply a new form of communication altogether, which the researcher names 'Smenglish' ('Social Media English'). These findings raise intriguing questions regarding the use of the informal register in oral versus online 'conversations'. In the fifth section, the limitations of the analysis are explored, in particular those related to the absence of a British corpus of language on the web at the time of data analysis. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further studies to enhance the validity of the findings discussed.

The main findings, discussed in this chapter, are summarised below:

- The increase in informal-register features post-intervention can be attributed to the content, task design, instruction methods and resources used in the intervention study.
- Use of contractions and emphatic language stood at 84% pre-intervention, compared to 40% post-intervention, indicating a more balanced use of informalregister features post-intervention.
- A correlation was found between the use of contractions and the use of emphatic language in the posts.
- A possible explanation for the reduced word count is related to mastery of the informal-register use or student motivation, but caution needs to be exercised

in regard to these findings, as indicators of both low and high motivation were identified.

- The language used in this study was found to be closer to written text than oral communication. The researcher terms this ‘Sminglish’, to indicate the type of English used (by second language learners) on social media sites.

8.2 The increase of informal-register features postintervention

Despite its importance for social interaction, little is known about informalregister use in foreign-language learning. This study showed that instruction focusing on the informal register is beneficial for foreign-language learners. Dedicated instruction in three types of informal-register features led to an increase in these and other informal-register features post-intervention. Prior to the intervention, 15 Stage One participants used 20 informal-register features per hundred words. After the intervention, this increased to 33 informal-register features per hundred words. After analysing the findings for all 15 participants, the researcher focussed on the individual performance of five randomly selected participants; Mrs Who, Canelo, Eureka, Penguin and Zelda.

The impact of the intervention study is evident as the frequency of the informalregister features increased for all five of these participants post-intervention. The average increase for this group was even larger than that for the entire sample: from 21% pre-intervention to 37% post-intervention. The intervention study took a first step towards preparing foreign-language learners for social interaction.

Table 15: Features of informal register in posting data per Stage One participant (n=5)

Grey columns indicate posts pre-intervention.					White columns indicate posts postintervention.					
Participant	Mrs Who		Canelo		Eureka		Penguin		Zelda	
Average informalregister features in post	18%	24%	18%	30%	24%	50%	28%	31%	20%	50%

Table 15 shows that appropriate use of the informal-register features increased for each of the five selected participants, with two of the ten posts containing 50% register features. Examples of the features present in the posts will be provided in the next section. To attribute these findings to the intervention study, a paired sample t-test was undertaken to establish whether these findings were random or significant. As $p = 0.039$, the findings were significant, which means that they can be attributed to the effect of the intervention.

8.3 The role of content in the intervention study

The use of the learning materials, rather than peer collaboration on the social networking sites, contributed to the increased use of register features post-intervention. This is corroborated by the academic literature (Jones, 2015), which demonstrates that the use of learning materials was perceived as more helpful to adult Welsh learners compared to online conversations. In addition to content, the increased use of informal-register features post-intervention can be attributed to three other aspects of the intervention study: (i) task design, (ii) instruction methods, and (iii) resources, which are discussed in detail in the next sections of this chapter.

The first aspect contributing to Key Finding 1 is the content chosen for instruction. The informal-register features present in the posts, taught in the intervention study and listed in order of frequency, as they appeared in student posts, were: (i) exclamation marks, (ii) contractions, (iii) emphatic language, (iv) informal nouns, and (v) abbreviations. Explicit instruction was used to teach contractions and emphatic language, whereas the other features were embedded in the materials of the intervention study. This study's finding that contractions occur most frequently in the posts, is evident from Figure 17, which corroborates Biber's (1995) work. Furthermore, this study's findings also indicated that emphatic language and exclamation marks were also used frequently.

The following sections consider the distribution of the informal-register features in the posts pre- and post-intervention. Figure 17 shows that the balance of features changed post-intervention.

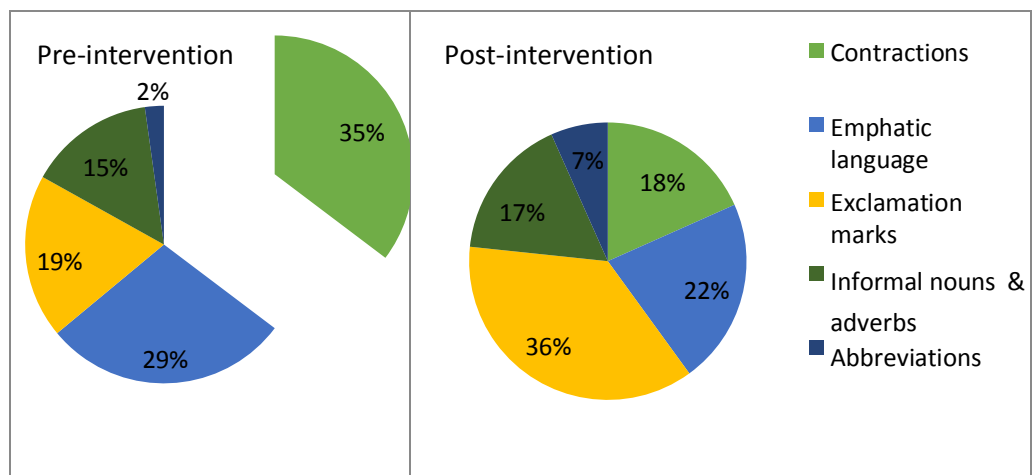


Figure 17: Informal-register features pre- and post-intervention (n=15)

Features which are generally taught at elementary stages of a foreign language class, such as contractions and emphatic language, counted for 64% of the informal-register features used pre-intervention. After the intervention, contractions and emphatic language only added up to 40% of all register features used post-intervention. The use of informal nouns and exclamation marks (categorised as emphatic language) increased post-intervention. These features are not commonly taught as part of the foreign language curriculum and were not taught explicitly in this study, but were embedded in the tasks. Postintervention, the use of informal-register features was much more balanced: the five targeted register features were used more equally, suggesting more appropriate use by Stage One participants. Figure 18 displays an example of the balanced use of informal-register features in a post which was produced postintervention.

Hi, X, anybody there? U must be still sleeping...☹ I've emailed you yesterday, but you didn't answer me! I've some important news...

Figure 18: Balanced use of informal-register features post-intervention

The post displayed in Figure 18 features the use of three contractions ('I've' and 'didn't'), emphatic language ('important'), an informal adjective ('some') and an abbreviation ('U'), indicating a more balanced use than pre-intervention posts. Figure 19 is an example of the pre-intervention posts, which typically included mainly emphatic language. In contrast to Figure 18, the post displayed in Figure 19 included five occurrences of emphatic language and one contraction; no informal nouns or abbreviations were used. The over-use of emphatic language

is not common in English, which could make this text less appropriate for the reader.

Wow, I really love the idea. I'm totally in :) I saw in the web page two things could be interesting to do: Sarah Lucas' exhibition (I saw the pictures and they're hilarious)and to see the dresses were used in the film Anna Karenina. So, what to you thing?

Figure 19: Extensive use of emphatic language pre-intervention

The post displayed in Figure 18 also included the use of an emoticon, which is indicative of informal texts. Just like 'u', it originates from language used in short message service (SMS) texts (Crystal, 2011). Neither the use of emoticons, nor the use of 'u' was taught as part of the intervention study, but learners clearly utilised their existing knowledge and applied this appropriately to the tasks undertaken as part of the intervention study.

The use of informal nouns remained relatively constant throughout the intervention study, with a modest 2% increase post-intervention. The use of these, also referred to in other studies as vague nouns: "are prominent features of the conversational genre" (Hinkel, 2003c, p1049). Examples include such words as 'guy', 'stuff' and 'people'. This relatively modest increase can be explained by the choice of content for the intervention study, as informal nouns were embedded in the tasks but not explicitly taught.

As was the case for informal nouns, exclamation marks were also embedded in emphatic language instruction. Exclamation marks were used both pre- and post-intervention. Prior to the intervention, exclamation marks made up 19% of all informal-register features found in the posts; this increased to 36% after the intervention. Figure 20 is an example of a post produced post-intervention in which the informal-register features present totalled 50% of the word count. The high frequency of informal-register features was made up mainly by the use of multiple question marks- and exclamation marks:

John!!!! are U there?? I'm still waiting for your reply about not going to England in July.
Please, contact with me it's really important!!!

Figure 20: Example of use of multiple question marks in post

Exclamation marks are readily associated with emphatic language. The use of exclamation marks is different in web-based text to other written communication,

as can be seen in Figure 20. Multiple exclamation marks and question marks are used, creating a feeling of urgency and importance. Crystal (2011, p35) suggests that the “number of question-marks or exclamation-marks reflects only the length of time the relevant key is held down”, but Lundell, Wherrity and Kjellén Simes (2009, p16) found that: "exaggerated use of punctuation is characteristic of teenage message boards" rather than related to the language used on the web in general. Whether or not extensive use is the case more widely, the use of multiple punctuation marks indicates the informal register, as increasing the number of these marks has no impact on the conveyed meaning, although it does have an impact on the 'tone' of the message.

The researcher suggests that the use of exclamation marks is an effort to change the 'tone of voice' which aligns to the objective of the message. This can be clearly seen in Figure 20, where exclamation marks are first used four times consecutively, followed by two question marks. Although the precise number of exclamation marks does not matter, this multiple use suggests urgency, and is common in online texts (Crystal, 2011). However, the overuse of exclamation marks is not a defining register marker of online texts, as is evident from Figure 19. Whilst exclamation marks are used four times in this text, their use is in fact well-balanced throughout the post, in which only single exclamation marks are used at the beginning and end of the message. The 'tone' of this text is therefore more neutral and less emotional than the text in Figure 20.

Hi! I've checked out Bounce and I think it's a fantastic idea! I've been wandering around that website and I've found lots of other interesting places I'd really like to go to. You know that I love cycling, so I'd also like joining to The Secret London tour. I'm sure it'd be amazing to visit London on a bike. And what about doing something related to poetry? It's impossible to find those activities here! Can we go, for example, to Rhymes with Orange? I was reading about it and it seems very interesting!

Figure 21: Balanced use of exclamation marks in post

To identify associations between the use of the informal register, a correlation analysis was undertaken. Unsurprisingly, this study found a correlation between the use of contractions and the use of emphatic language. This corroborates Biber's (1988) earlier work which identified emphatics as a key feature of the informal register. Emphatic writing also commonly features exclamation marks

(Bearne and Eve, 2009). However, in this case, the correlation between exclamation marks and contractions can in part be explained through the overuse of exclamation marks, as is common in some online texts (Crystal, 2011).

8.4 The role of theory-based task design in the intervention study

The second aspect contributing to Key Finding 1 was a carefully constructed theory-based task design. This section focuses on the theoretical implications for task design, whilst the e-learning model informing the stages in task design is discussed in Chapter 9. To align the pedagogical aims of this study with theory, Sociocultural theory was applied in terms of sense-making and authentic interaction, in line with the collaboration made possible by social networking sites.

Features of the informal register were introduced through explicit instruction in weeks two, three and four. Where appropriate, when introducing a new topic, sense-making activities followed explicit instruction. An example of a sensemaking activity is shown in Figure 22: such activities help to stimulate internal dialogue and collaboration (Arvaja, 2015). This activity was part of a larger task, in which students first read a transcript of an interview, with informal-register features naturally occurring in the text. Stage One participants were then asked to find three examples of the targeted informal-register features present in the transcript. In this activity, the focus of the tasks was to first identify contractions in the text, and then to explain their meaning. Stage One participants were given a table to complete to provide structure to the activity.

4. Find three contractions in the first paragraph and write down their meanings in the table below.

Contraction	Meaning

Figure 22: Example of sense-making in week 2

Tasks were scaffolded throughout the intervention study by providing simpler tasks (Gibbons, 2002) at the beginning of the study, followed by more complex tasks in the latter tasks. The example described in Figure 20 is one of the simple tasks, as the use of the table helped learners to follow pre-identified steps to guide their sense-making process. The table provided encouraged student first to identify the contractions and then consider the meaning of each from the text.

A more complex task took place in week 4, in which students were asked to explore the use of emphatic language in comics. This is yet another example of an activity which includes sense-making by asking learners to explain the use of the targeted informal-register features in a particular setting.



Figure 23: Sense-making in week 4

This time, the task was more complex as learners had to produce their response on the social networking site. One of the learners' responses is displayed in Figure 23. As expected, learners used the same structure as in Figure 22, even though the table was no longer present. Learners first identified the feature (in this case, capital letters), then explained the purpose (in this example, to make the emphasis stronger), as indicated in Figure 23. These two features of Sociocultural theory, sense-making and scaffolding, therefore contributed to the impact of the intervention study.

When interaction took place on the social networking site, it provided valuable learning experiences. As displayed in Figure 24, three students were involved in collaborative interaction regarding the use of 'Thanks' and 'Thank you'. The following week, this sequence of interaction was then summarised by the researcher on the social networking site, so that all participants would be able to learn from it. This sequence of collaborative interaction occurred as Stage One participants were encouraged to comment on each other's use of language, with the aim of making: "lateral and vertical connections with prior learning and life experiences to enable gradual contribution of generalisations" (McGregor, 2007, p221). Learners made these gradual contributions of generalisations by providing additional lexis to help each other increase their use of the informal

register. The researcher responded to this interaction by giving further examples (such as 'Cheerio' and 'Ta-ra') and by so doing, extended the learning materials even further, as indicated in Figure 24. The combination of authentic use of register, sense-making, collaboration, student-curated knowledge and timely feedback all contributed to the increased use of informal-register features postintervention.

Task 4 Feedback from your posts

Last week you were asked to post some informal and formal sentences. Below is an example of a sentence posted by your peers.

"I beg your pardon, I would feel very dignified if you share this pretty evening. Thanks."

Some of your feedback on the sentence included:

"It's formal but even it can be more with Thank you instead of Thanks."

"it's a mix between formal and informal. i think it's formal because he doesn't use contractions and uses the word dignify. But in a formal context I'm not sure if I'd use thanks. For me, it's informal."

"Thank you" is indeed more formal than "thanks", although the latter can also be used in business communication. Terms such as "cheerio", "cheers", "toodle-pip", "later on, bro" and "ta-ra" would be used in a more informal setting and never in a formal business setting.

What other words that are used in the above sentence might contribute to its informal 'feel'?

Post your response [here](#).

Figure 24: Collaborative feedback on Ning

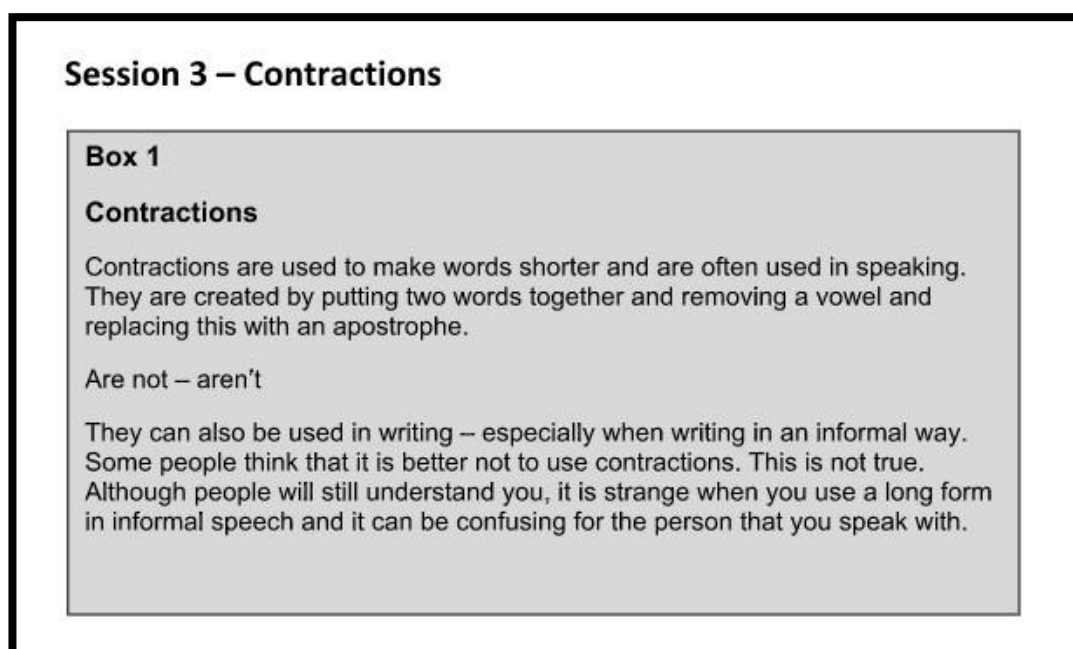
In summary: the materials used for the intervention included the use of authentic language, collaboration and sense-making, all activities associated with Sociocultural theory. Tasks informed by Sociocultural approaches have been found to be more effective than other approaches (Dixon et al., 2012), suggesting that the specific structure of the task duly influenced the increased use of informal-register features post-intervention.

8.5 The role of instruction methods in the intervention study

The third aspect contributing to Key Finding 1 are the instruction methods used in the intervention study. This section focuses on how the language used in the instructional text for the learning materials modelled the informal register and gave explicit instruction in the use of the targeted informal-register features. In

contrast to custom in instructional texts, the tasks were written in a more informal manner. Instructional texts often use an imperative verb form (D'Souza et al., 2016), sometimes referred to as 'bossy' verbs. An example might be: "Write ten sentences" which can feel formal to learners. The instructional texts in this study avoided the use of imperative by writing in a more conversational style: "What does 'she's gone' mean?", for example. Conaway, Easton and Schmidt (2005, p25) suggest that: "writing in a friendly tone" engages students in the development of their learning, and the language of the intervention tasks was based upon this 'friendly' approach. It is possible that the modelling of 'friendly language' influenced the language used by students in Stage One of the intervention. As intended, it was likely that the tone of the instructional texts modelled the use of informal-register features by students in Stage One of the intervention.

Explicit instruction relies on clear explanation of rules (Halenko and Jones, 2017), and this approach was followed in the intervention study. In accordance with the findings in the current study, in other studies explicit instruction using metalanguage has been shown to be effective in developing grammar features (Spada and Tomita, 2010; O'Dowd, 2012). Explicit instruction mainly took place in tasks two, three and four.



Session 3 – Contractions

Box 1

Contractions

Contractions are used to make words shorter and are often used in speaking. They are created by putting two words together and removing a vowel and replacing this with an apostrophe.

Are not – aren't

They can also be used in writing – especially when writing in an informal way. Some people think that it is better not to use contractions. This is not true. Although people will still understand you, it is strange when you use a long form in informal speech and it can be confusing for the person that you speak with.

Figure 25: Example of explicit instruction

Tasks two, three and four commenced with explicit instruction, with the term defined as displayed in the task (Figure 25). This introduced the notion of contractions, together with rules relating to their use. The aim of the example was to provide learners with a real-world example. After the definitions of terms and the examples provided, learners worked through a series of tasks. These tasks aimed to reinforce the topic and allowed learners to practice the use of the informal-register features.

Reasons why explicit instruction of language features is more effective (Tammenga-Helmantel et al., 2016) are not yet fully understood, but Spada and Tomita (2010) suggest that particular grammar features, such as contractions, are not always easy to point out in naturally-occurring language. Metalanguage is commonly used in developing academic language (Schleppegrell, 2013), but few studies have explored its use in informal-register instruction. The use of metalanguage applied to informal-register use adds a level of new knowledge and complexity for advanced learners. The comments provided by Stage One participants demonstrated that the use of metalanguage was perceived to be effective by learners. This may be explained by the non-linearity of language learning. Language development at more advanced levels is often non-linear, resulting in difficulties for advanced learners in measuring their own progress. The introduction of new terminology helps learners in measuring progress, as new knowledge is often seen as progress. The role of metalanguage in explicit instruction provides opportunities for participants to synthesize the newly acquired knowledge, by comparing it with similar structures in their mother tongue.

8.6 The role of resources in the intervention study

The fourth aspect contributing to Key Finding 1 is the resources utilised in the intervention study. This section considers the use of Ning to practice 'speaking' and the use of rich media in task design.

8.6.1 Use of Ning to practice 'speaking'

The structure of the tasks covered the four skills learnt in foreign-language education: (i) reading, (ii) writing, (iii) listening, and (iv) 'speaking'. Whilst reading, writing and listening were embedded in ways similar to those found in a traditional language classroom, 'speaking' was practised through the posts on the social networking sites, as indicated in Figure 26.

Task 3, Exercise 4

- Posted by [Researcher](#) on February 9, 2013 at 11:30
- [View Blog](#)

Download the Ms Word document for exercise 4 [here](#). Work through the tasks and post your comments on task 3, exercise 4 in the comments below. What other words that are used in this sentence might contribute to the informal 'feel' to this sentence?

Post your response in the comments below.

Views: 43

[Like](#)

[Share](#)[Twitter](#)[Facebook](#)

[< Previous Post](#)

[Next Post >](#)



Comment by [Prue](#) on February 9, 2013 at 18:12

[Delete Comment](#)

Maybe the word pretty. I'd use great, something more neutral instead of pretty which I think it's more personal.

Feel is another word which I'd use in informal more than formal. I think in formal you're more neutral and not express your emotions, but maybe I'm wrong.

- [Edit](#)



Comment by [Brontë](#) on February 10, 2013 at 18:42

[Delete Comment](#)

I think "dignified" is a false friend which means *calm and serious and deserving respect* (Oxford English Dictionary)

I don't know why but I think beautiful is more formal than pretty.

Figure 26: 'Speaking' on Ning

Ning functioned as a 'professional community' to stimulate communication between learners, but was also used as a platform to store the e-learning tasks. In each of the tasks, students were asked to provide a response as indicated in Figure 26 to practice 'speaking'. In line with Lee (2001), this study implemented 'chat speak' - a combination of oral and written discourse – sometimes phonetically written by the user in the same manner in which they would normally 'speak' during oral communication.

Not all Stage One participants took part in 'speaking': or at least they did not post a response. On average, only five out of fifteen Stage One participants engaged in 'speaking' activities, as discussed further in Chapter 9. These five 'speaking' participants, were not the same participants who contributed to Stage Two. For example, the contributions from Brontë and Prue were not included in Stage Two (as only five contributions were selected to keep the questionnaire to as limited pages as possible), but Zelda and Canelo's were included and they also participated in 'speaking'. However, when participants took part in 'speaking', the interaction demonstrated the appropriate use of the informal-register features taught. An example of the appropriate use of informal-register features taught in 'speaking' is the use of contractions, as displayed in Figure 24 in both Prue and Brontë's comment. Inclusion of 'speaking' on Ning was a conscious choice for task design, as it used the linguistic and collaborative affordances associated

with social networking sites to achieve a clear pedagogical aim: to practice oral communication. The influence of 'speaking', as used on Ning, may be somewhat limited by the relatively low use of the tasks. But for those participants who took part in these opportunities, it contributed to the increase in informal-register features post-intervention.

8.6.2 Use of media-rich materials in the intervention study

The resources used in the intervention study were varied and media-rich to engage learners (Foss, Oftedal and Lokken, 2013). YouTube videos were embedded in the tasks, selected for their use of authentic language, time span, and topic covered. In foreign-language learning, the use of video has been gaining in popularity, as it offers innovative ways to promote intercultural literacy, and can provide an authentic flavour of a particular culture. The video shown below, for example, was chosen for two reasons: firstly, the style of the video is conversational; secondly, the venue - an experimental cocktail club - was thought likely to be of interest to professionals and visitors to London. The length of videos is important in e-learning materials: it is proven that videos with a time span of less than 6 minutes are more likely to engage learners (Guo, 2013).

REMOVED FROM ELECTRONIC VERSION

Figure 27: Example of a YouTube video using authentic informal language

As is associated with good educational practice, the use of video was combined with tasks for learners to complete. In this example, learners had to watch carefully as multiple-choice questions were included for completion after watching the video.

Another example of the use of authentic English embedded in the tasks, was via use of a programme available on the BBC website, displayed in Figure 28. This resource included both text and audio materials, which focused on the word 'awesome'.

REMOVED FROM ELECTRONIC VERSION

Figure 28: BBC resource 'The English we speak'

The example included a sense-making activity in which Stage One participants were asked to decide whether cakes could be described as 'awesome'. The use

of these YouTube clips and BBC resources helped learners to practice the informal register.

A final example of media-rich content included the use of comics in Task 3, in which Stage One participants were provided with a comic to identify emphatic language and were then asked to produce their own comic using an online tool. One of the comics created is included in Figure 29, which includes contractions, informal nouns, and emphatic language.

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Figure 29: Cartoon produced as part of Task 3

The use of media-rich materials aimed to engage learners: feedback indicated that the use of diverse materials was beneficial for learning but also enjoyable, which indicates that these media-rich learning materials contributed to the impact of the intervention on the use of informal-register features.

8.7 Competence rather than acquisition in five weeks

Fewer words were used in the assessments post-intervention, yet the average use of the informal-register features increased. This finding indicates that participants had come to use features of the informal register more appropriately. Skill development requires knowledge of the content and ability to undertake the task (Eva Fitriani and Wawan, 2015). Skill development normally occurs over a period of time in language learning (Sockett, 2013). In this study, the participants learnt and applied the instruction provided in the short period associated with the intervention study. Learning a new concept is often associated with frequent use before competence (Walter and Walter, 2015), with learners initially producing the new concept too often, before they learn how to use it more sparingly, and therefore more appropriately. After only five weeks, an increase in use of the informal-register features was anticipated, with a higher word count likely, as found in the initial-assessment posts. This occurred as the initial assessments took place in week one, after the learning materials were introduced. Learners were introduced to the concept of the informal register but had not yet learned how to use it appropriately. Both the word count and frequency of informalregister features in the initial-assessment posts indicated that learners

had understood the concept but not yet its appropriate use. Only when learners became sufficiently confident to apply the use of the informal-register features appropriately, did their use become more balanced, which resulted in the reduction in word count. As the time span of the study was limited, the study anticipated achieving frequent use rather than appropriate use. Therefore, the reduction in word count in contrast to the increased average use of informal-register features post-intervention was an unexpected finding and indicated a better-than-anticipated educational outcome.

Competence in the use of informal-register features is one explanation for the reduction in word count. Student motivation could have also played a role, as will be discussed in the following section. The comments provided by Stage One participants indicated that students perceived the learning materials as 'easy' which could be an indicator of low student motivation (Fjellström, 2014). On the other hand, earlier studies have shown that 'easy' tasks lead to higher task completion (Igoe and Sullivan, 1993; Shen et al., 1996). In contrast, high student motivation can be evidenced by the findings of this study, which demonstrated that learners extended their learning activities (Schuitema, Peetsma and Van Der Veen, 2014). As displayed in Figure 30 Zelda refers in her post to the grammar rules regarding verb tenses relating to conditional sentences, which extends learning from informal language to other grammatical features.

Feb 14



Zelda commented on Researcher's blog post [Task 3, Exercise 4](#)

"I'm not sure at all but maybe I'd change "pretty" as it's a too common term and I'd rewrite "share" into the past simple "shared" so that it fully respects the rules to form conditional sentences..."

Figure 30: Example where learners extend own learning

A possible explanation for the decrease in word count is a decrease in student motivation. The reduced word count could have been an indicator of reduced motivation as a lack of effort in producing the final posts would have led to a reduced word count. It must be noted that participants' perceptions of what constitutes an 'easy' task are likely to be incorrect, as estimations of difficulty are complex (Conejo et al., 2014). The key problem with estimating difficulty in implementing informal-register features is that there is not the same level of 'correctness' for the informal register, as there is no 'rule-book' (DeKeyser, 2005). Furthermore, Taguchi (2014) found that even native teachers are not inclined to correct the informal register when communicating with L2 learners.

The lack of clear rules and feedback when mistakes are made contributed to participants' difficulty in estimating the complexity of the tasks provided in the intervention study, with the decrease in language production as a result in the last task. Explaining this complex relationship between context, social conventions, and differences in perceived context-appropriateness, supported learners in experimenting with language and becoming more independent in working out appropriate forms for themselves.

Throughout the intervention study, there was evidence of learners extending their learning beyond the materials provided. As mentioned in section 8.4, the study referred to the use of collaborative conversations, where use of the words 'Thanks' and 'Thank you' were discussed without being prompted by the researcher. An extension of learning is also present in Figure 31.

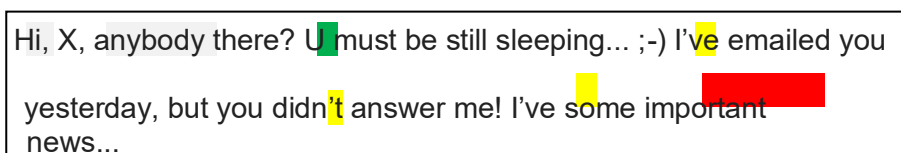
A screenshot of a text message within a white rectangular border. The text reads: "Hi, X, anybody there? U must be still sleeping... ;-) I've emailed you yesterday, but you didn't answer me! I've some important news...". Several words are highlighted with colored boxes: 'U' is green, 'I've' is yellow, 'didn't' is yellow, and 'I've' is yellow. There is a red rectangular redaction mark over the word 'important'.

Figure 31: use of 'U' in intervention study

The post shown in Figure 31 demonstrates that Stage One participants extended their own learning by including student-curated knowledge in the assessment posts. This finding contrasts with the earlier hypothesis of a lack of student motivation in the posts, as motivation is needed for students to extend their own learning opportunities.

An increase in language production is associated with the development of skills (Kim, Park and Park, 2015). Furthermore, reduced production, as evident in lower word count, can also be associated with increased skill development as advanced learners develop summarising skills (Pearson, 1981). The reduced word count can be related to competence of the informal-register features or low student motivation. Stating a minimum and maximum word count for each post would ensure that the word count pre- and post-intervention is comparable but this prescription might restrict the authentic use of the informal language.

8.8 Sminglish, rather than Netspeak

The informal-register features undertaken in this study did not fully resemble oral communication. The language analysed in the posts could not be identified as

'utterances' written down, nor did it fully match the linguistic make-up of Netspeak. Netspeak is described as a form of language which resembles oral communication and is used on the internet. The use of social networking sites helped to create community groups with their own meta-language (Thurairaj et al., 2015), which was also evident in this study. Where the English used on social networking sites has been found to include acronyms such as 'BFF', as well as changes to verb forms and nouns (Hetal and Jigisha, 2014), none of these were found in this study. The use of the informal-register features ranged between 24% and 50% post-intervention. Exact comparison data were not available, but the researcher's estimate is that analysis applied to informal utterances such as 'Wha'd'ya want?' would find informal-register frequency as high as 75%. There are two possible causes for the frequency difference measured in the analysed posts and oral communication.

The posts shown in Figure 31, displayed in the previous section shows features of an oral speech pattern. The frequency of informal-register features for this post was 30%, which is comparable to the other texts. Commas are used in a similar manner in oral speech. The comma after 'Hi', indicates a pause, which is common in verbal communication. The use of 'U' in the text is an example of Netspeak (Crystal, 2011), which was not included in any of the teaching material.

The frequency of informal-register features found in the study did not resemble oral texts. This might be due to the linguistic nature of social networking sites. Social networking sites' main form consists of written text, but the language used includes oral features. It is much more fluid compared to other forms of written communication as "the English used in Social Networking Sites like Facebook and Twitter has changed the linguistic behaviour of the people" (Hetal and Jigisha, 2014, p132). The academic literature also suggests that social networking sites have a hybrid discursive nature, which combines the formal written register and the informal oral features (Soffer, 2010; Crystal, 2011). The proportion of this hybridity (written versus oral) has not yet been defined for social networking sites. Contrary to the findings in this study, terms such as Netspeak suggest that the register features present in internet language most closely resemble oral communication. Notably, the findings in this study point to a dominant structure in the analysed posts, which is closer to written text than oral communication. The researcher names this use of language 'Sminglish',

referring to the use of English (by foreign-language learners) using a social media site.

Naturally, the ability of Stage One participants to fully embrace the use of the informal-register features could have also contributed to the difference between the posts and oral communication. Although a significant improvement from preintervention, the use of the informal register could still be further optimised, as is evident in the post shown in Figure 32.

Although informal-register features are present, there are many more opportunities for the use of informal-register features.

Hey. How's it going? I have started looking thing we can see and places we can go shopping in London. I leave the details in the e-mail. So, what do you think? Do you like the places? Please let me know soon, so I can plan the whole thing.

Lots of kisses

Figure 32: comment fragment by Prue as part of Task 5

The post has been rewritten using these informal-register features to demonstrate the use of contractions ('I've'), informal nouns ('thing'), exclamation marks (!!!) and abbreviations ('pls'). By using additional informal-register features, the text is closer to oral communication, but still does not resemble it. For instance, the use of 'lots xxx' is unlikely to be used in a face-to-face conversation, but might be more appropriate in a telephone conversation.

Heya, how 'r u? I've done some delving 4 things 2 do (shopping!!!). Drop u a line soon, u tell me ok and I'll book!!! Lots xxx

Figure 33: comment fragment as per figure 30, rewritten by the researcher

As with Netspeak, Sminglish includes such speech-like features as abbreviations and omissions. Sminglish includes a range of informal greetings such as 'Hi', 'Hey', 'Heya', 'Hi!!!!'. Interactions in Sminglish end with communications used in telephone conversations, such as 'Lots of kisses' or 'Love', or with no specific language to signal the ending at all. Contractions are common in Sminglish, most often used in the first few sentences, but full forms are also used, as indicated in Figure 33. Exclamation marks can be used to give emphasis to a sentence. Both

exclamation marks and emphatic language were used extensively, with the former often used consecutively at the beginning and end of an interaction.

8.9 The benefit of dedicated instruction of the informal register features as perceived by Stage One participants

Whilst the previous section focused on language level, this section analyses the benefit of the study to the participants in terms of raising awareness and informal-register practice. The data gathered from various sources - including the questionnaires, social networking posts, and the feedback from all participants - suggested that the study material was perceived as beneficial as indicated in the post shown in Figure 34: according to these sources, the intervention material further enhanced knowledge of informal-register features. Learners also suggested that they benefitted from the opportunities to practice use of the informal register in the tasks provided in the study. The majority of participants were aware of the informal register prior to the intervention, but stated that they had underestimated its importance.

'As it's been said before, reading all the previous comments after doing this task myself has been incredibly useful to realize about some features used for emphasis.'

Figure 34: Comment fragment by Little Prince as part of Task 5

The analytical data provided by the social networking site indicated that the participants utilised the material provided, which demonstrates the positive impact of the materials. This is especially important as there was no incentive for participants to continue with the learning activities, it can therefore be concluded that they were perceived as beneficial.

In summary, then, this study found that dedicated classroom instruction in the use of the informal register delivered through social networking sites, had a positive effect on register use, as perceived by the students.

8.10 Limitations of the method

A major weakness of the data analysis method used, was employment of linguistic taggers trained using different corpora than the informal register. Baker (2010, p13) suggests that: "web language is not representative of spoken language or written language per se, but it is a variety in itself". He argues that digital communication forms have an impact on the way language develops worldwide. Ideally, the corpus used for this study would have been produced with the language used on social networking sites.

It was not possible to utilise a linguistic tagger developed using a web-based informal-corpora for British English, as such a corpus had not yet been established at the time of data analysis. The only web-based informal corpus available was compiled in the United States in 2015, using Facebook posts (Bazarova et al., 2013). This web-based corpus would have been more suitable were it available in British English, as it included status updates of 79 individual participants. Unfortunately, it was only available in American English, and was therefore deemed inappropriate. The differences between British English and American English are considerable, and the same words can have different connotations (Dewaele, 2015). For example, in British English small living space in a block in the city is referred to as 'flats', whilst American English refers to those as 'apartments'. Apartments in British English are perceived as more luxury in comparison to a 'flat'. As the best option available, both MAT and CLAWS were used, as detailed in Chapter 6, which were trained using the British National Corpus. MAT was particularly appropriate for this study, as it replicated Biber's (1988) tagger for the multidimensional functional analysis of English texts. In any case, any linguistic comparison that uses a corpus is limited in its comparability, as it is effectively out of date as soon as the corpus has been assembled (Baker, 2010). However, this lack of currency does not apply in the same way to all features of the corpora. The use of contractions, for instance, has remained fairly constant over time, possibly as they originate from Old English (Grieve, 2011); features which have been in a corpus for a long time are less likely to change over time within the corpus itself (Jack, 1999).

Together, the suitability and currency of the reference corpus used suggests that the findings outlined in this chapter should be considered with a degree of caution. Several questions are yet to be resolved; in particular the use of exclamation marks in online text, versus their use in informal texts. Repeat

analysis of these findings using a linguistic tagger trained using a web corpus, would not only validate the findings in this study, but would also provide opportunities for further analysis of web-based texts, including use of exclamation marks and other forms of punctuation.

8.11 Generalisations, implications and further research

This study was based upon previous work (Toetenel, 2011; Toetenel, 2014), which demonstrates that language instruction techniques on a social networking site may be generalisable to other populations. Whilst acknowledging sampling limitations related to the pretest-posttest intervention, the notion that dedicated instruction increases learners' knowledge and appropriate use, is a widely accepted pedagogic principle. Furthermore, the careful crafting of learning tasks, followed by retrospective analysis of the task design, and the positive feedback from Stage One participants, all suggest that the findings could be generalisable to a larger population of language learners.

This study reinforces the recommendation that dedicated instruction of informal register features should be incorporated at all stages of foreign language learning. The use of informal-register features increased post-intervention and their use was more balanced and thus more appropriate. Furthermore, Stage One participants indicated that they had underestimated the importance of the informal register, and stated that they found the intervention beneficial. It can be seen, then, that dedicated instruction of the informal-register features should be included in the foreign language curriculum for all the foregoing reasons.

8.12 Summary

This is the first of three discussion chapters to examine the three key findings outlined in Chapter 7. The purpose of this chapter was to answer research question 1: How did students use the targeted features of the informal language, as measured at the beginning and end of the intervention study? This chapter discusses the implications of Key Finding 1: the increase in informal-register features identified post-intervention. Key Findings 2 and 3 are discussed in Chapters 9 and 10 respectively. This study found that variation in frequency and balance in the use of informal-register features was indeed identified post-intervention. This variation can be attributed to the learning materials in terms of (i) content, (ii) task design, (iii) instruction methods, and (iv) resources.

The reduction in the word count found in this study can be explained by competence of skills and/or student motivation. The chapter revealed that the language found in this study does not correspond fully either to oral communication or to Netspeak. The idiosyncrasies of learning English using social media prompt an altogether novel form of communication, which the researcher has elected to name 'Sminglish'. The chapter also outlined the benefits of the study to the participants, and the limitations of some of the data analysis methods used, and concluded with recommendations of the implications of this work for policy makers and foreign-language teachers.

Chapter 9 Discussion: Traditional E-learning models create a desert biome of interaction

9.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings relating to peer-to-peer and teacher-student interactions during the intervention study. It considers research question 2, What impact did the study have on students' communicative interactions with their peers?, via an analysis of the interactions between participants - including between the teacher and researcher - during the intervention.

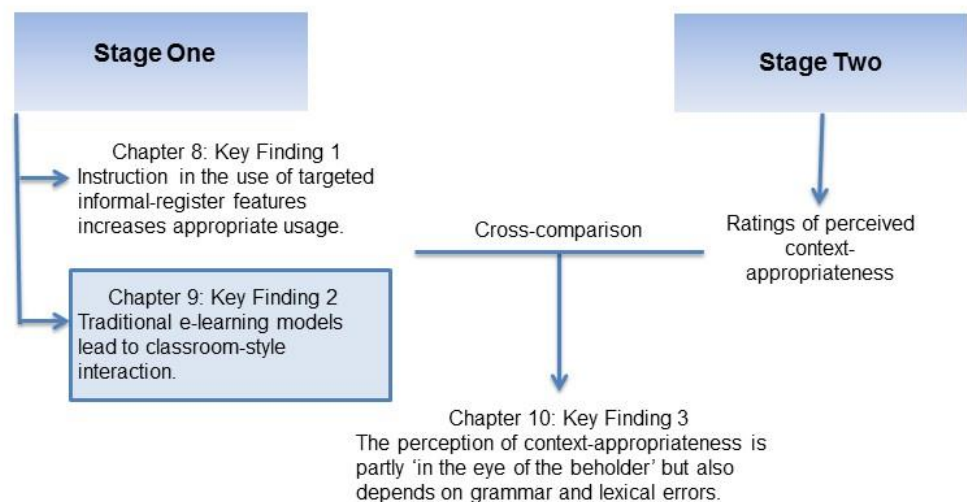


Figure 35: Key Finding 1

It begins with a discussion in Section 9.2, of the researcher's pre-intervention anticipation of how the interactions on Ning might play out, based upon the task design model employed. The following section reveals the surprising results based upon the data analysis, including the three main findings. It then explores the possible underlying drivers which contributed to these findings.

Each of the findings is then examined in greater detail in sections 9.3 to 9.5, together with a discussion of the potential implications for teachers and the academic community.

9.2 The Promised Land versus the desert biome

The implementation of a naturalistic environment for language use (in which informal interaction can take place) is traditionally difficult in formal instruction (Belcher, 1999). The researcher therefore made a significant effort to ensure the task design was based upon sound academic foundations and followed 'good practice' as identified in the academic and practitioner literature. The tasks were designed to include activities that encourage peer discussion and learning as part of the communicative approach. This was considered a key requirement for the purposes of investigating the informal register within a social network setting. Peer-to-peer interaction between students, rather than teacher-driven interactions, were considered to be more likely to result in a more natural employment of the informal register.

The relationship between a student and a teacher is unequal and tends to be more formal, thus inhibiting or discouraging use of the informal register. It was therefore important to carefully craft the intervention tasks to encourage learner-to-learner interaction. The relevant academic literature and the researcher's own extensive experience and training in designing course materials for ESOL learners were utilised when preparing the intervention exercises as discussed in the literature review. More information about the rationale behind each task is included in Chapter 6 and the tasks themselves are included in the Appendix.

Having designed the framework and tasks so carefully, the researcher expected that students would interact with one another throughout the study – establishing to an extent, the 'Promised Land' of educational behaviour. As task design was based upon Sociocultural theories of learning, as discussed in the literature

review, the researcher's anticipation was that all students would interact and learn from their peers. However, in practice, it did not play out as anticipated. Peer interaction on Ning did not resemble the Promised Land, and for large parts of the intervention it more closely resembled a 'Desert Biome'. Some interactions between learners did occur during the study, but these were singular events, like oases in a desert with the rest of the environment bare; where participants just responded to the tasks set by the researcher. These findings were unexpected.

In summary, then, the study found the following (unexpected) behaviours, which will be explored further in this chapter:

- Overall participation on Ning declined over time, including after the content delivery stage, which contrasts with the work of Salmon (2004) on which the task design for this study was based.
- Peer interaction on Ning took place, but was much lower than expected and only occurred in 18% of the posts, whilst the findings suggest that peer collaboration only occurred once in the study.
- Connections and friendships on Ning did not correspond to those established on social networking sites but replicated classroom-style behaviour.

There are three main explanations for the patterns of interaction that the study found. The first reason is that the five-stage model introduced by Salmon (2004) was based upon online distance learning courses and predates social networking sites and sources of free learning such as MOOCS. The pattern of interaction found in the study does resemble the patterns of engagement found on MOOCS, as discussed further below.

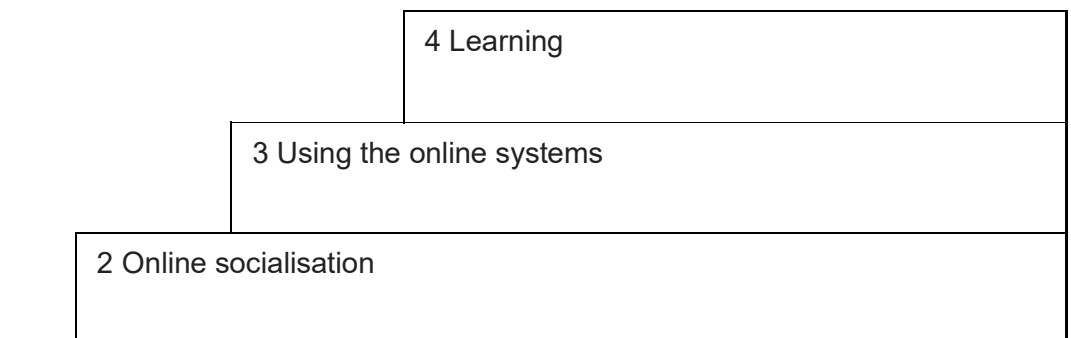
The second reason for this lack of interaction - the bare sand of the Desert Biome as opposed to the lush canopy of the Promised Land - is that the participants in Stage One of the study were not used to or prepared for peer interaction. This is a salient finding, as many ESOL teachers work with diverse group of students across the world that have no experience of, or are not prepared for, this type of engagement. Even so, educational providers across the world base their lessons upon Sociocultural theories of learning, even though the actual provision is influenced by more traditional educational cultures, learning structures and content.

The third reason for the lack of interaction was revealed after employing a Learning Design review. All tasks were coded using a granular Learning Design methodology to consider the detailed design. When the planned Learning Design was analysed and compared to the analysis of the actual tasks which students completed, it was clear that traditional e-learning models are not sufficient in guiding a teacher to design for engagement: the tasks, though carefully crafted, did not provide sufficient or consistent opportunities for interaction. This is a crucial finding as many educators are of the opinion that the learning materials they produce achieve their aims: when these are evaluated in an unbiased, structured way, however, it can be seen that this is not always the case (Bryan and Toetenel, 2015). It is important to note that this granular method of analysing learning tasks was not available at the time of the study design, as the tool was only developed in October 2015. Consequently, there was no opportunity for the researcher to control for this occurrence and it can be assumed that this gap between design and delivery is present in many studies.

The link between initial design and in-depth review of learning materials prior to use by students is essential for all educators to ensure that their learning materials achieve the aims envisaged. The three following sections in this chapter will discuss each of the findings in more detail and consider the reasons for their occurrence.

9.3 Is the inclusion of a socialization stage enough or is a ‘hook’ needed to stop learners from dropping out?

The interaction of students on Ning did not follow the aspirations of the five-stage model introduced by Salmon (2004), even though this formed the basis of the task design. To remind the reader, the five-stage model by Salmon (2004) was adapted in this study through the amalgamation of the ‘knowledge construction’ and ‘development’ stages into the ‘Learning’ stage as shown in Figure 36. Further information and explanation of this adaptation are outlined in section 3.7.



1 Access and motivation

Figure 36: *The S-Model for teaching and learning online, (adapted from Salmon 2004, p29)*

Salmon (2004) suggests that the use of a scaffolded model which motivates learners to access the online system and provides systematic tasks for online socialisation increases the amount of interactivity between the learners themselves (e.g. peer-to-peer learning) and the learning materials. However, this study found that interactivity did not increase over time, but in fact declined shortly after the socialisation stage was completed as displayed in Figure 16.

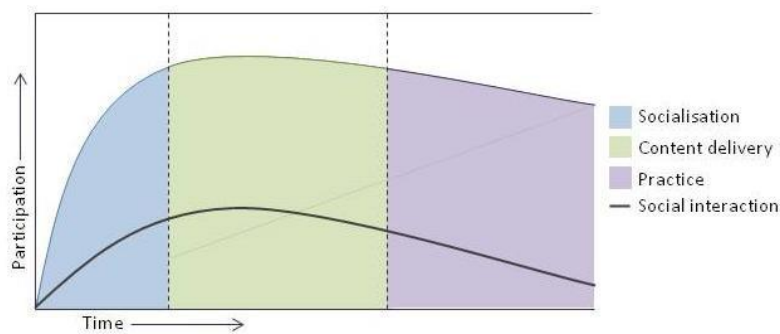


Figure 16: *Participation and interaction (both peer-to-peer interaction and interaction with the learning materials) on Ning*

The diagram in Figure 18 is divided into three stages (socialisation, content delivery and practice) to show how participation by learners changed during the intervention. The three stages map to the four stages in the utilised model for task design (see Figure 7 on page 65), where socialisation equates to stages 1 and 2; and access and online socialisation and content delivery and practice equate to stages 3 and 4; using the system and learning. The 'using the system' and 'learning' stages each included tasks with two disparate educational aims that focussed on content delivery and practice, which is why they have been separated in the diagram.

Figure 18 shows that participation increases initially, during the access and socialisation stage, which corresponds to the first task on Ning. Participation (and thus engagement with the social networking site) is still increasing when the socialisation stage is ending, but then it reduces over time, initially when tasks are introduced that deliver content but also later on in the study when students are given the opportunity to practice what they have learnt. Participants respond

throughout the intervention to the tasks provided by the researcher, but, overall, are less engaged in the practice elements of the study.

Figure 18 shows that the first task, in which participants were asked to socialise with one another, succeeded in its objective to support participants to find their way around Ning. This was because the researcher helped the participants navigate around the site by providing hyperlinks to the most important sections of the website, much like a technical support role in line with Salmon (2004).

Task 1 was also designed to be highly motivational for students, as it endeavoured to stimulate socialisation by encouraging participants to share some of their personality in a safe, anonymous manner. For instance, in the first task participants were asked to pick an avatar; an animal picture with which they identified. Participants then explained why they chose their animal, changed their profile picture accordingly and were asked to comment on the animal pictures of their peers.

In effect, this first activity was designed to help participants work together and encourage participants to form friendship groups. This is illustrated in Figure 37 which represents a contextualised version of the model the task design was based on (Figure 7 on page 103).

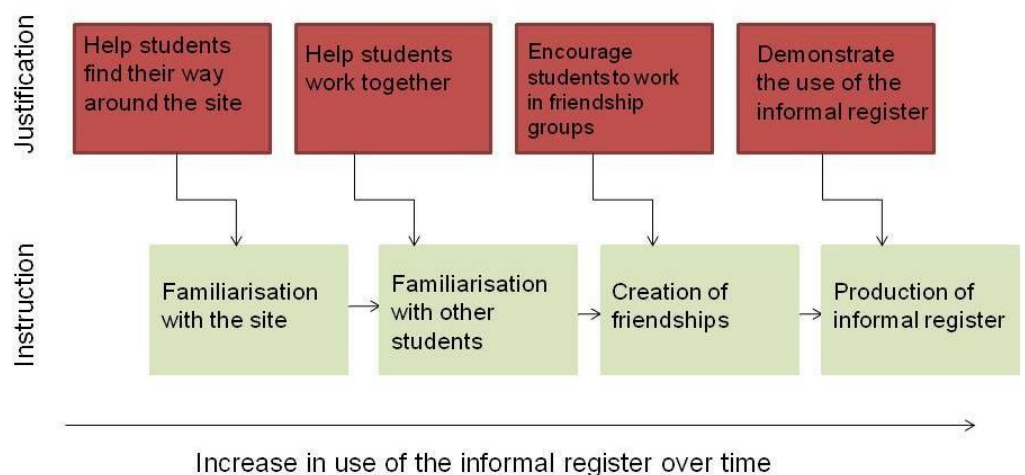


Figure 37: Task design which incorporates the informal register in social networking sites

The data showed that the socialisation stage of this study worked well, with all participants, as predicted, changing their profile pictures and discussing their choice. Participants shared videos of their animal avatar by providing links to YouTube, asked their peers questions, and commented on each other's video links. The majority of the students were progressing as expected based upon the

design of the intervention and completed the learning materials within the first few days of launch. According to the researcher's observations, only a few students struggled with the use of Ning.

These findings demonstrate that the first task was successful in allowing students to access and socialise with one another as intended by the task design for the intervention. It later emerged, however, that students were struggling even though they submitted their posts, and did not inform the researcher or their tutor of any problems. Later, upon analysis of the comments embedded in the MS Word documents and the time students took to complete the learning materials, it became apparent that they would have benefited from more time spent on familiarisation tasks to ensure that they became competent in the use of Ning. This is where the success of the task design based upon the five-stage model ends, as there is no opportunity for students to revisit the familiarisation stage. Interaction during tasks two through five decreased, indicating that although the socialisation stage of the study was successful, interaction in the remaining stages did not increase.

After an initial decline, the number of tasks completed on Ning remained relatively stable (seen in Figure 38). It is important to consider the upload of the task when analysing interaction, as Figure 36 shows that participation in the project remained stable, even though interaction declined.

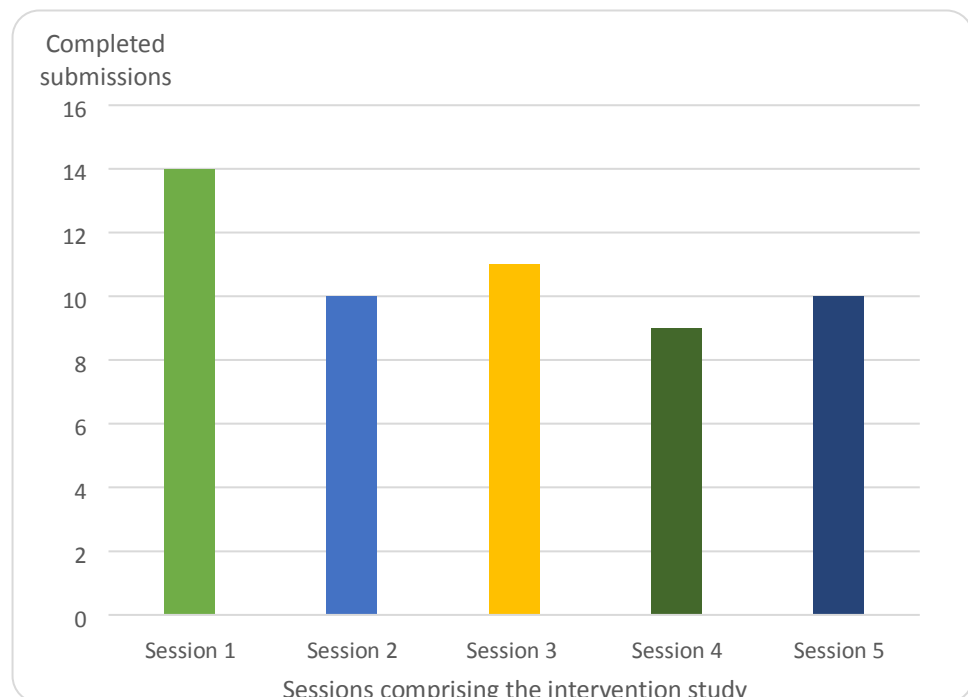


Figure 38: Nominal number of uploaded and completed tasks on Ning

This unexpected finding leads us to question the appropriateness and reliability of the scaffolded model as suggested by Salmon (2004) to stimulate interaction, rather than participation with the learning materials - particularly because the peak in social interaction occurred at the beginning of the content delivery phase; just when, according to Salmon (2004) learning should increase.

Salmon's five-stage model was introduced in 2000 and was based upon use in online distance learning courses. Although the model technically does not predate social networking sites per se, it does predate their use in distance education. The idea behind Salmon's five-stage model (2004) is that interaction needs to be kindled; once learners have established ways of interaction, they follow a certain rhythm of learning: e.g. writing their opinion followed by a discussion on the forum. According to the Salmon (2004) model, once set up correctly this rhythm of interaction then continues for the duration of the course.

At the time Salmon's five-stage model (2004) was developed, informal and free learning materials were not widely available. The first Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), were launched in 2006, six years later after the inception of the five-stage model. Although informal and free learning materials were available prior to 2006, MOOCs made it easier for learners to find them and as a result, the uptake of these has much increased.

Although Salmon's model might have been appropriate for online distance learning at the time it was developed, the findings of this study suggest that it may not function as effectively for learning materials delivered on social networking sites. Utilisation of the model, in Stage One of this study, did not achieve the envisaged level of engagement. At the time of conception of the study, Salmon's (2004) model was the most popular framework used for task design in e-learning. Now, however, at the time of writing the thesis, Salmon's (2004) model has attracted a certain amount of criticism (Moule, 2016). As in this study, one of the main criticisms of the model relates to the difficulty in determining whether "an appropriate level of socialisation was achieved" (Moule, 2016) as the model itself provides no guidance. Although useful at a conceptual and theoretical level, Moule's (2016) work does not provide any empirical data to suggest that the model does not work. This study's finding of a reduction in interaction after the socialisation stage, contributes to the body of work challenging Salmon's (2004) model.

The pattern of interaction found in this study closely resemble the patterns of engagement, as found on MOOCS. Moule (2016) argues that Salmon's (2004) model ignores the variety of e-learning approaches and associated theories available. Consequently, in hindsight, a MOOC-based design might have been more appropriate; particularly as Stage One participation was very much in line with active participation on Coursera-style MOOCs (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013).

Student patterns in Coursera-style MOOCS show that the percentage of active participants in the first week is relatively high, before declining gradually throughout the courses (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013) as shown in Figure 39.

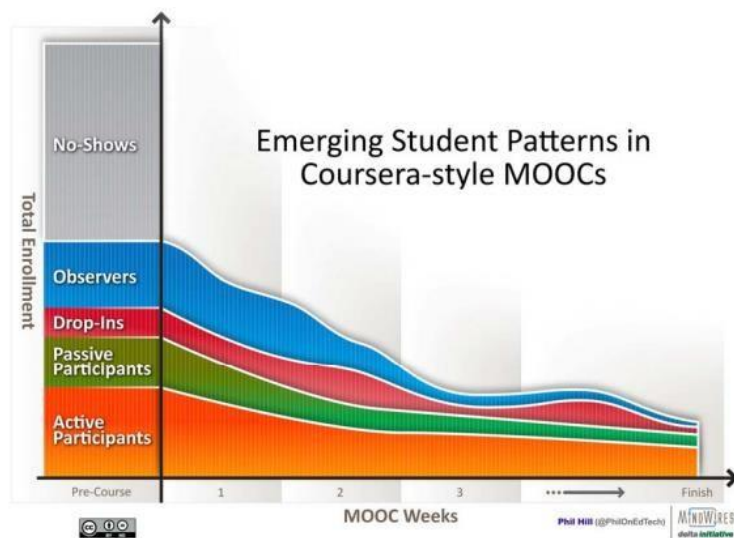


Figure 39: Patterns of student participation data in Coursera MOOCs by Phil Hill

Curiosity and wanting to learn new materials are considered the main reason for participation in MOOCs (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). It is possible that these were part of the reason for participants' decision to participate in the study. The boundaries are blurred between online course offerings: where traditionally MOOCs were open and available for free, assessment methods are now offered for a fee, with some students viewing MOOCs as essentially a university 'taster' (Howarth et al., 2016). The same applies to social networking sites, as sites such as Twitter are sometimes used in academic circles to share information. However, whether courses are open, closed, massive or small, they are vehicles for learning content, and the same can be argued for social networking sites employed for learning.

Whilst MOOCs are traditionally free and can be seen as Open Educational Resources (OER), many MOOC providers, including Coursera, are now providing the opportunity to undertake their MOOCs for a fee. Toetenel (2014) argued that Ning could essentially be seen as an OER; whilst Ning charges a fee for utilisation, there are always costs involved to institutions in hosting OERs. Even if an OER is free in simple monetary terms, it is in effect not free in the sense that participants need to invest time and effort to complete it. This is also the reason why participants drop out of MOOCs (Herodotou and Mystakidis, 2015); their investment is perceived as larger than the benefit they receive from the learning materials. It is possible that the decline in interaction on Ning was caused by similar reasons, although it should be recognised that participants might also have felt a responsibility to complete the intervention to support the research project that they consented to.

Many MOOCs now include 'hooks'; learning activities designed to encourage learners to come back to the course the following week. The rationale behind their design originates from soap operas, where cliff-hangers are introduced at the end of the season to ensure that viewers will return the following season. A hook might be a question, which is then answered in the following session: it might be a video, of which one part is shown in the first week, with the remainder shown the following week. Although drop-out rates are still high for MOOCs, techniques which are designed to motivate the learner to return to the site might have been more effective in the intervention study design than the implementation of five-stage model developed by Salmon (2004). As many educators who design online learning materials utilise the five-stage model developed by Salmon (2004), it is important to question its continued effectiveness in the blurring landscape of learning materials and vehicles for delivery.

The hype of MOOCs has now passed (Fischer, 2014), but there is still no consensus as to how to retain students in MOOCs or in other OERs. Retention in education is a widely researched topic, but there is scope to translate existing academic knowledge pertinent to the topic into practical models that can be tested and used by language teachers. The use of a granular Learning Design tool as discussed later in this chapter can also help in developing and evaluating these models.

9.4 Peer interaction in diverse student populations

As introduced in the previous section, learner-to-learner interaction of students on Ning more closely resembled a Desert Biome than the lush vegetation of the Promised Land, particularly in the context of peer learning. The findings show that during the initial familiarisation stage, some friendships were created on the social networking site; but this only occurred four times. In a typical social networking site, each participant would be connected to at least two others, so at least twenty-four connections would have been expected. All students participated in the socialisation stage, but just seven of the eleven participants connected to one or more of the other participants. Only one of the participants made multiple connections; on two occasions, this individual made connections with two peers - commonplace in a typical social networking site, but a singular occurrence on Ning.

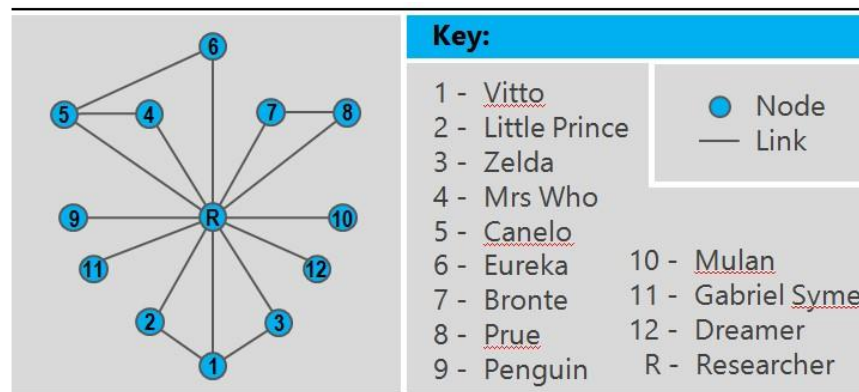


Figure 40: Sociogram of Stage One of the study (adapted from Karampelas (2012, p133))

The network diagram shown in Figure 40, shows the relationships or connections on Ning, the dots representing the participants and the researcher. The lines drawn on the diagram indicate connections, where participants have engaged with their peers or the researcher, based upon the posting data gathered. The researcher is located in the centre of the network, as most of the interaction was initiated or in response to the tasks and/or posts she provided. Figure 38 also shows that four of the participants did not connect to any of the participants, or to the researcher.

Figure 41 is an illustration of a more typical social network, in which all participants connect to more than one other participants and no single participant is the centre or hub of the network.

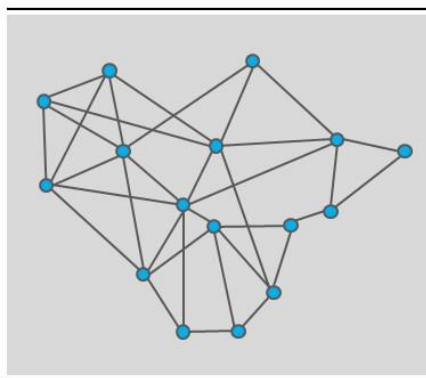


Figure 41: Typical social network structure (illustrative, adapted from (Wasserman and Faust, 1994))

Comparing Figure 40 to Figure 41, it is evident that the relationships and connections in this study are different from those in traditional social networking sites, where all participants connect to at least one other. Furthermore, in a traditional network several participants are central to parts of the network. By contrast, in this study, only one participant was central to the network, and that was the researcher or teacher. Students only connected to others four times, and this after they were instructed by the researcher to invite each other as friends. As a consequence of the instruction, four students connected with a peer in the group, which was very similar to forming pairs in a classroom setting. The study therefore concludes that although a social networking site was used for the study, the relationships on Ning formed according to classroom-style interaction: the teacher remained central to the network and peer interaction mainly took place only as a result of instruction, which is similar to the situation in a traditional teaching setting.

There was significant engagement by learners with the tasks and, even though the Ning environment did not seem to have a substantive impact on the way learners interacted with each other, they did respond to the teacher and the learning materials. This may suggest that learner-centeredness should be investigated from a different angle; as Anton's study (1999, p314) suggests, 'the analysis of teacher-learner interactive exchanges .. shows that teachers, through dialogue, can lead learners to become highly involved in the negotiation of meaning, linguistic form, and rules for classroom behaviour during classroom activities'. This means that students can negotiate meaning and linguistic form, as illustrated in the example post shown in Figure 42. In this example, meaning is negotiated by Prue using analysis of neutrality and linguistic form through the application of emphatic language. Prue uses 'feel' as an example.

Feb 9



Prue commented on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 4](#)

"Maybe the word pretty. I'd use great, something more neutral instead of pretty which I think it's more personal. Feel is another word which I'd use in informal more than formal. I think in formal you're more neutral and not..."

Figure 42: Comment by Prue

The ensuing debate saw learners consider the linguistic form of the word 'pretty', and whether it is formal or informal. The discussion was triggered by a comment suggesting that the word 'pretty' should be replaced by a more neutral word. One of the participants explained that amplifiers and words that express emotion tend to be used in the informal register; other participants responded to this comment with examples of other words that might be used as an alternative to 'pretty'.

Another example in which students negotiated meaning through dialogue was as part of a debate that took place on Ning. Smyth (2011, p120) suggests that synchronous interaction prompts learners to think in greater depth, and reflect on their learning, which leads to a more powerful learning experience. A debate is an example of establishing a dialogue. Even though in this study it was mainly asynchronous, it is an example of this type of interaction. The task involved an interview with Russell Brand about Amy Winehouse and drug use. This was chosen as it was anticipated that learners would have differing views on the subjects of drug use, thus encouraging natural discussion.

Ten participants commented on each other's work in this task, with several responding more than once. No input from the researcher was provided in this debate, nor was a 'correct' answer provided. It is clear that the participant who originally used the word 'pretty' learned from this interaction, as he states, "Bronte is right. I thought that 'pretty' was pretty formal". This response is a good example of peer discussion and peer learning using a social networking site.

This is an important finding as it demonstrates that although this type of interaction was rare during this intervention, the study set up this type of interaction successfully so that participants could learn from their peers in an authentic setting. It is also important to note that students may have read the posts and replies of their peers, but not felt it necessary to provide further comment. The reading of posts is not tracked in the data provided by Ning and thus cannot be analysed.

Open Online courses often classify learners as either 'posters' or 'lurkers'. Posters are those students who participate in the course, post their views, and/or comment on the views of others. Lurkers are defined as students who do not choose to post (Sankaram and Schober, 2015). This study argues that this distinction is not sufficient, as all students posted in response to the learning materials and to the teacher, but also 'lurked' because they often chose not to post in response to their peers. It would be more helpful, then, to consider three groups of students when considering interaction; 'responders', 'posters' and 'lurkers'. Responders are those students that post in response to posts of their peers, whilst posters interact with the learning materials, but not with the views of the community around them. Figure 43 shows the relative proportion of the 'responder' and 'poster', posts. 'Lurkers' are omitted from this graph as their data could not be tracked. There were 102 entries on Ning, of which 18% were classified as 'responder' entries, and 82% were 'posts' in which students had either responded to the learning materials, or to the teacher/researcher.

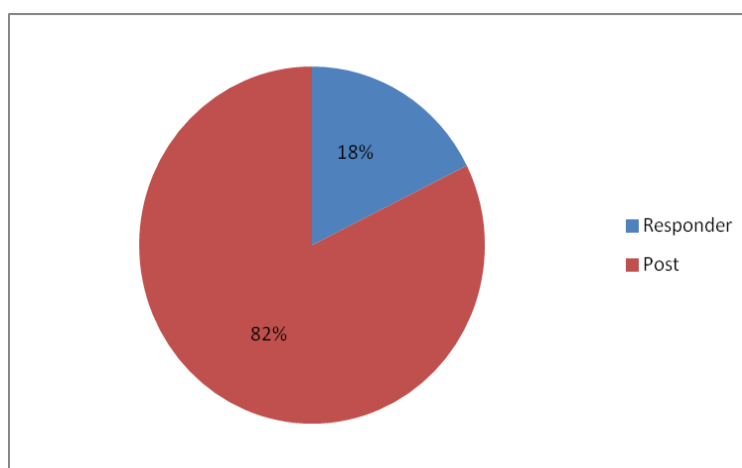


Figure 43: Responders and posts on Ning as of the total entries

Another interesting finding from this study was that development of friendships on Ning had the same features of 'pairing up' that are found in a classroom situation: Vitto connected to Little Prince and Zelda; Mrs Who connect to Canelo, but Canelo also connected to Eureka, whilst Bronte and Prue formed a final pair. This interaction is similar to the response of students when a teacher sets a task and students are asked to work in pairs. Students who are already friends, or are in physical proximity to each other, tend to pair up. On a social networking site, it is less evident to students who they should work with. In a classroom, students tend to look around and make eye contact before pairing up: clearly, this is not possible online. Nevertheless, a version of this behaviour was repeated in the

virtual environment, as students 'looked around them' to see who had not yet made a 'friend', before inviting them to be their friend. Although participants could 'see one another' on Ning, they did not invite the rest of the group to be 'friends', suggesting that the 'friendship' was a response in relation to the task, rather than an interest in being friends with a peer. Rather than just using the 'invite friend' button, students made direct representations, as in the post by Bronte below.



Figure 44: Comment Bronte

The notion of having to ask permission to become another student's friend is another interesting finding as it is an implicit protocol and this does not occur on traditional social networking sites such as Facebook or Google+. On these sites, participants simply click the 'invite friends' button, rather than sending the peer a separate message to ask whether they want to be friends (as occurred on Ning). All participants in the study completed the tasks in their own time, but, because they were recruited from the same school, it is likely that they knew each other in real life and would possibly have spent time together. This could have meant that there was no need to 'become friends', which could have led to low interaction in the familiarisation stage. If this would have been the case, interaction would have increased, whilst the study findings indicate it declined. Belcher (1999, p257) suggests that the use of CMC helps in ensuring that prejudices are not formed in terms of race, gender, age, national origin, and physical appearance. However, if the students knew each other prior to the study, this advantage would not apply. But these types of prejudices, as well as the friendships that were already formed in the traditional classroom, could have had an impact on interaction during the intervention.

So far this study has shown that participants did not behave as anticipated by the researcher:

- Patterns of friendships and connections on Ning did not manifest in the same way as seen in other social networking environments

- Learner-learner interaction was much lower than envisaged; only 18% of the participants responded to posts from their peers or the researcher.

The next section will explain the reasons for these unexpected findings, and consider the importance of this in terms of language teaching, as well as directions for future academic research.

9.4.1 Reasons for the little oasis in the desert

To remind the reader, for many of the exercises which comprised the intervention study, learners were asked to post their answers on the social networking site. Although they completed this, they did not interact at all with each other's answers; instead the majority of the interaction took place as a result of prompts from the researcher. Bannink and van Dam (2006, p286) suggest that "formal school settings normally generate specific expectations for and constraints on who can do or say what", which very probably had an impact on the students' behaviour, even on the social networking site. The findings of this study corroborate and extend Bannink and van Dam's analysis.

The social networking diagram representing the connections between participants (Figure 45) shows clearly that the teacher/researcher

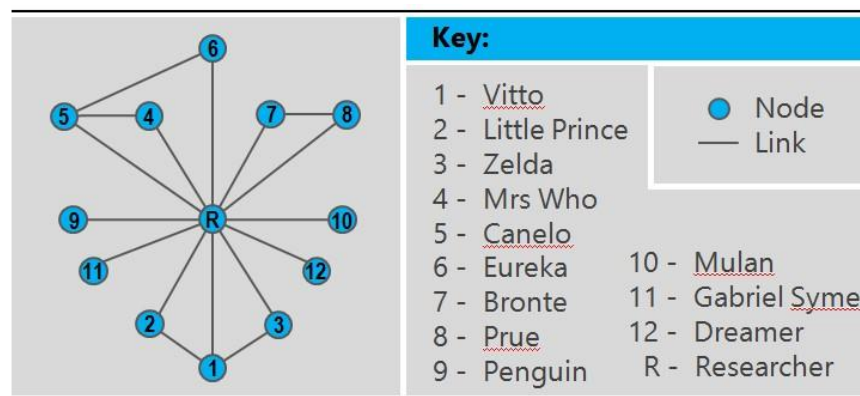


Figure 45: Sociogram of Stage One of the study (adapted from Karampelas (2012, p133) is central to interaction. This image is similar to interaction in a traditional language classroom. Even though participants undertook this research study outside of their normal classroom activities, they still behaved according to classroom conventions.

This is an important finding that has implications for the recruitment of participants in research but also for educators as they explore the affordances of both informal and formal learning materials. This study shows that conventions of past educational behaviour inform current student behaviour. Further research

would benefit both educators and the academic research community, especially studies which investigate learners' expectations and actual behaviour in an informal versus formal learning setting.

Lo and Macaro (2015) suggest that it takes time for students to get used to integrated content and language learning, including learning new features of the informal register in English. Overall participation, and thus interaction, was lower than expected, which may have been caused by the short time frame of the study. They also found that the elements that impact on the success of interaction using integrated content delivery include learner's ability, task design and the pedagogical approach of the teacher. Lo and Macaro (2015) found that the use of learner-participation and interaction is less effective when implemented in later school years. These findings suggest that the task design for the intervention study was less effective because it was implemented, without earlier introduction, in an already established learning environment. As all participants in the study were professionals, it is likely that they would have experienced various stages of schooling before they encountered this study; that notwithstanding, they may not have been exposed to the inclusion of an integrated content delivery method. In addition, Del Pilar Montijano Cabrera and Leggott (2014) state that education in Spain continues to be more traditional and less student-focused. One of the reasons for the lack of peer-to-peer interaction can therefore be attributed to the educational background of the students in the study and consequent expectations of the participants regarding behaviour in formal education.

The participants in this study were a relatively homogenous group, recruited from the same geographical area, and all were speakers of Spanish. In many language classrooms, the educational background and associated expectations of students are much more diverse. This fact is particularly important when considering task design for participants in international schools across the globe. The diversity of the student populations might mean that due to the educational background and the lack of exposure to Sociocultural approaches in language teaching, a proportion of the students might not engage with learner-to-learner interaction as outlined in this chapter. This finding has substantial consequences not only for current teaching practice but also for staff development of teachers. Although studies (Sato, 2013; Janssen et al., 2015) have been undertaken to

better understand and address this lack of peer engagement, these have not yet been integrated into staff development or guidance for language teachers.

9.5 Analysing Learning activities in order to design and evaluate learning materials

As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, significant time and effort was spent on the design of the tasks for the intervention study. To better explain these unexpected findings relating to interaction, all tasks were analysed retrospectively, using a finely grained Learning Design coding methodology. In 2015, the Open University introduced this refined method for retrospectively analysing and coding learning materials. Research from the Open University (Toetenel and Rienties, 2016b; Cross et al., 2012) shows that actual learning materials often are different from the balance of activities as stated in the original design, which might explain the lack of interaction in the study. The researcher therefore coded the intended task design (Figure 46) and the actual learning materials (Figure 47).

The analysis revealed that the learning materials provided in the intervention study were different from the original design, in line with the findings from the Open University (Rienties and Toetenel, 2016; Rienties, Toetenel and Bryan, 2015; Toetenel and Rienties, 2016a). This section will explore the differences between the initial design as set out by the researcher versus the actual learning activities that were undertaken by the learners. Then, measures of learner satisfaction and retention are identified in the study before these are analysed in combination with the Learning Design data.

The initial design as envisaged by the researcher is displayed in Figure 46, utilising the Learning Design tools developed by the Open University (OU) (Cross et al., 2012). Although this is referred to as the initial design, it was not available at the time of the task design, it was therefore undertaken after the intervention study had concluded.

The activity planner as displayed in Figure 46 shows that the initial design for the intervention, as envisaged by the researcher, was highly productive (33%) and communicative (25%) in line with the Sociocultural theories that informed the task design.

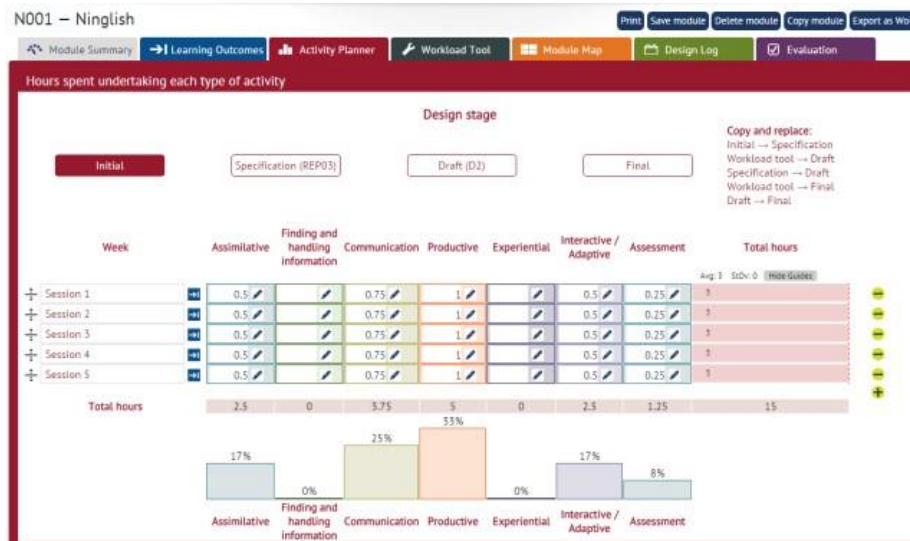


Figure 46: Planned design for the tasks provided in the intervention study

In other words, the researcher envisaged that students would spend the majority of their time producing materials (text, cartoons, posts on Ning) and communicating with one another or the researcher. As this chapter has already noted that only 18% of the posts responded to other students work, so it is unlikely that the envisaged balance of activities actually took place. This cannot be assumed, however, as students might have spent more time on producing responses to their peers than they did on the posts which they completed in response to the tasks.

Figure 47 shows the actual balance of activities undertaken as part of the intervention project.

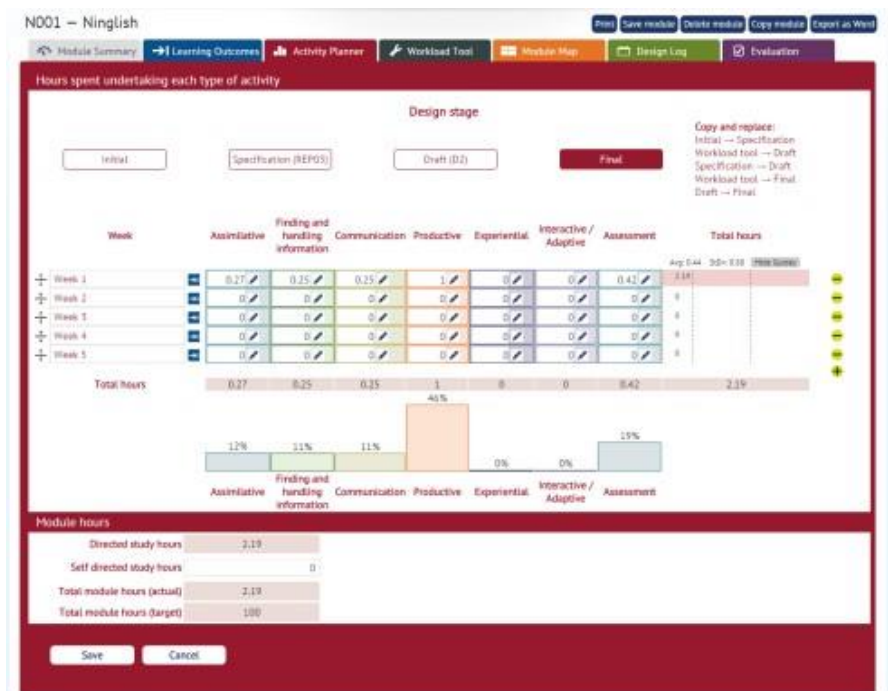


Figure 47: Actual design for the tasks provided in the intervention study

It must be noted that coding learning activities remains subjective, but the visualisation was produced utilising a standardised mapping convention by the researcher (a Learning Design specialist) and subsequently reviewed by a second Learning Design specialist, so that the reliability and robustness of the data was enhanced.

Figure 46 above shows the initial design of the tasks in the study, whilst Figure 47 shows the actual design of the tasks that were undertaken by the students. The two visualisations indicate that the tasks undertaken by students focussed more on 'finding and handling information' and 'assessment' tasks than initially envisaged, and less time on communication and simulation activities. As a result, it is likely that peer interaction on the site was lower than initially planned.

The time spent on productive tasks (tasks in which students produce an artefact or a piece of written work, in this study the posts on Ning for instance) was higher than initially planned. One of the participants commented: "My god, this is long..." after completing a series of productive tasks. It is difficult to ascertain the exact meaning of this comment: it may be that the tasks were too similar, in which case they might be perceived as long and boring. This type of qualitative feedback can support Learning Design analysis (Toetenel and Rienties, 2016c). In addition to evaluating the overall Learning Design, it is also important to identify those tasks, which are effective in engaging learners. This allows the researcher to measure students' satisfaction with the learning tasks. Both satisfaction and retention (retention in this study is defined by the number of tasks that were completed) are important measures of whether the individual tasks met their educational objectives. Although for this study it is irrelevant whether the task design was successful in ensuring completion of the tasks set in this study, these measures are very important to teaching professionals.

The majority of learners considered task 5 (week 5 of the intervention) as the most engaging of the five tasks that they undertook, suggesting that it was 'dynamic and diverse' and 'stimulating'. The material for week 5 included the four skills; listening, reading, writing and 'speaking' (i.e. responding on the social networking site), so the design of the tasks was no different to any previous week. The week started with an assessment of the participants' English language skills. It then included a reading task which took students to a UK

government page giving information about Big Ben; this included an optional game in which students were asked to clean Big Ben.

Task 5 provided an exercise related to each of the previously completed tasks and included various videos, including one of a chef in China Town making Dim Sum, which participants mentioned that they enjoyed. 'Satisfaction' as indicated in Table 16 was calculated using a Likert scale of 'low', 'medium' and 'high' based upon the comments provided by the students and the classroom teacher. The comments from the classroom teacher also demonstrated that the participants enjoyed the learning materials because they were different from 'text-book learning'. It is also important to consider students' feedback in comparison to the frequency of tasks completed (completion rate). For instance, although students enjoyed task 5 more than the other tasks, only eight named students completed this task. When considering the completion rates of tasks, it is important to note that not all students provided a name when they submitted their tasks, but ten different task 5s were submitted. The completion rate remained relatively constant over the duration of the study, increasing slightly in session 5. As the data set is small, it is difficult to draw conclusions, but as both satisfaction and named completion rate of task 5 is high, it could be argued that the combination of different tasks, and the authentic use of both written and verbal language, was effective.

Table 16: Satisfaction versus completion

Learners	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
Satisfaction	N/A	N/A	N/A	Medium	High
Tasks completed	14	10	11	9	10
Anonymous tasks	7	4	5	3	2
Completed named tasks	7	6	6	6	8

The findings in this section have substantial implications for teachers both in terms of task design and evaluation of their teaching materials. As outlined in this chapter, it is easy for even an experienced practitioner to stray away from their

intended educational objectives when they start writing learning materials. The coding of learning materials following set conventions can be helpful in evaluating them before they are released to students. Although the coding of learning materials retrospectively is subjective, the data becomes increasingly meaningful when using in conjunction with student outcome data such as retention and satisfaction measures. Using different data sets is often associated with Learning Analytics approaches and is generally related to the use of large data sets. This study has shown that these approaches are also useful in smaller data sets, and could provide much needed context and empirical evidence in future language studies.

9.6 Summary

Chapter 9 is the second chapter in a section of three, that discuss the findings of this study. This chapter focused on interaction on Ning. Whilst the task design aimed to stimulate peer interaction, most of the interaction took place between the researcher and the participants. The study found that overall participation on Ning declined over time, including after the content-delivery stage and this raises the issue of whether the five-stage model developed by Salmon (2004) is appropriate for social networking sites and sources of free learning such as MOOCS. The study also found that connections and friendships on Ning did not replicate those established on traditional social networking sites. In contrast, the relationships formed on Ning seemed to replicate traditional classroom behaviour; possibly due to participants' expectations set through their experiences in formal educational settings. Furthermore, peer interaction on Ning was much lower than envisaged: it only occurred in 18% of the posts, whilst peer learning occurred precisely once during the entire study. Finally, the study found that when all tasks were coded using a fine-grained Learning Design methodology, the actual learning materials delivered to students differed from the intended design. The study suggests that the limited interaction found on the site could be due to the employed task design, learners' background and difference between task design and implementation.

Chapter 10 Discussion: Contrary to participants' beliefs, perceived context-appropriateness is driven by sociolinguistic, rather than linguistic factors

10.1 Introduction

The main goal of foreign-language learning is communication, as it can be seen as a medium in order to acquire basic needs. Interaction is a prerequisite of communication. In this study, an unusual form of interaction took place between the Stage One participants ('Them') and Stage Two participants ('Us'). Stage One participants sent their messages by producing posts in the intervention study: these were provided by the researcher to Stage Two participants ('Us'), who duly gave them a rating, and their evaluations are in this study referred to as 'perceived context-appropriateness'. The degree to which this communication was effective, was assessed by considering the third research question: Which factors influenced the ways in which speakers of English perceived the appropriateness of the posts generated during Stage One of the study? To address research question 3, the posts produced by Stage One participants were compared to the ratings produced by Stage Two participants as displayed in Figure 48.

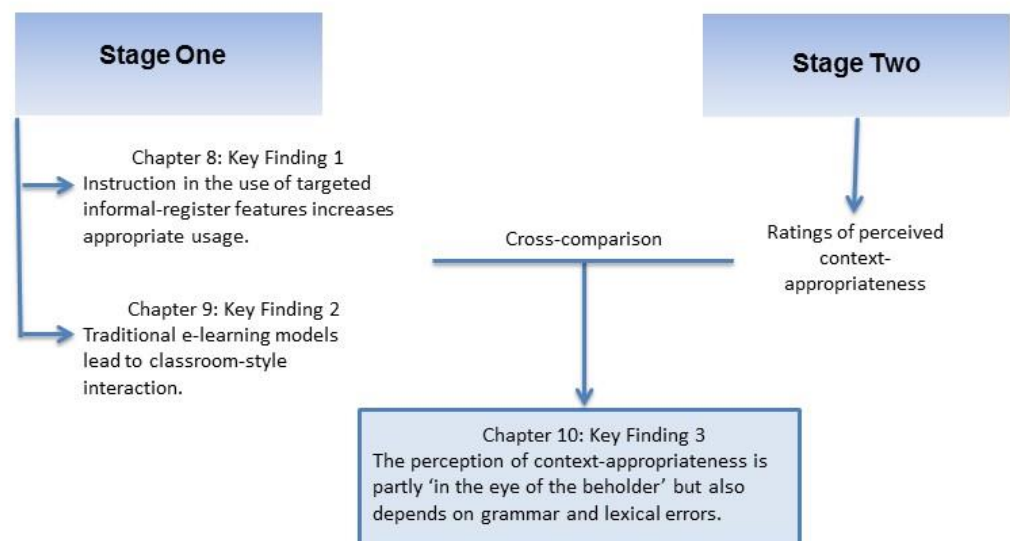


Figure 48: Key Finding 3

This chapter is divided into six sections. First, it focuses on 'Them' by discussing the language-use and self-declared language level of Stage One participants. It then focuses on 'Us' and discusses patterns of perceived context-appropriateness. One of these patterns, namely the impact of such sociolinguistic characteristics as the age of the participant and their knowledge of Spanish, is discussed in section 10.4. Finally, section 10.5 discusses the limitations of the questionnaire designed for Stage Two of the study.

The main findings discussed in this chapter are summarised below:

- No relationship was found between perceived context-appropriateness and the frequency of informal-register features present in the posts.
- There was considerable consensus between speakers of English as to which post was most and least appropriate for the context provided.
- Individual preferences in using informal language influenced the judgements made by the speakers of English.
- A highly significant negative correlation was found between perceived context-appropriateness and age of the speakers of English.
- The English speakers' use of social networking sites influenced perceived context-appropriateness
- The group of speakers of English who also had knowledge of Spanish rated the posts as more appropriate than the rest of the Stage Two participants.

10.2 'Them': a comparison of linguistic features and perceived context-appropriateness

As revealed in Chapter 7, the frequency of informal-register features in the posts increased post-intervention. The increased presence of informal-register features indicates that Stage One participants used the informal register more appropriately post-intervention. As a consequence, it was expected that the ratings of the speakers of English would also be classed as more 'appropriate for the context provided', but this turned out not to be the case. 76% of preintervention posts were rated as correct or appropriate for the context, whilst

this was only 72% post-intervention. When analysing the ratings in more detail, they reduced by 2% as evident in Table 17, demonstrating overall somewhat less appropriate ratings post- intervention.

Table 17: Perceived context-appropriateness pre- and post-intervention (partly shown)

Answer options	Preintervention	Postintervention
Appropriate for the context	52%	50%
Correct use, but I would not use it this way	24%	22%

To explain this surprising finding, perceived context-appropriateness was compared to the informal-register features found in the posts. A t-test was used to consider whether the features of the informal register present would predict the perception of the Stage Two participants. The Paired Sample correlation is .088: as $p > 0.05$, this is not considered significant, and we can say that no relationship exists between the informal-register features present in posts, and perceived context-appropriateness. In other words, this study revealed that the presence of the informal-register features did not influence the way speakers of English rated the posts produced by Stage One participants: in view of the fact that were asked to base their ratings upon the perceived contextappropriateness of the posts for use in the informal register, this was a surprising finding.

Even though analysis showed that the frequency of informal-register features did not influence perceived context-appropriateness, the comments of Stage Two participants indicated that they thought they had indeed considered the use of linguistic features in their ratings. Participants in Stage Two were asked to provide a qualitative comment for each post that they rated: these were then analysed through a thematic analysis and frequency of occurrence. The words that occurred most frequently in the comments were 'appropriate', 'grammar' and 'informal'. Stage Two participants' judgements were based upon register use and the text's need to be clear, understandable and 'error-free'. This is a crucial finding as it indicates that technical accuracy is the most important influence on perceived context-appropriateness.

Surprisingly, the same comments which indicated that grammatical mistakes impacted on perceived context-appropriateness, themselves demonstrated lexical mistakes. For instance, the word 'grammar' was incorrectly spelled as indicated in Figure 49.

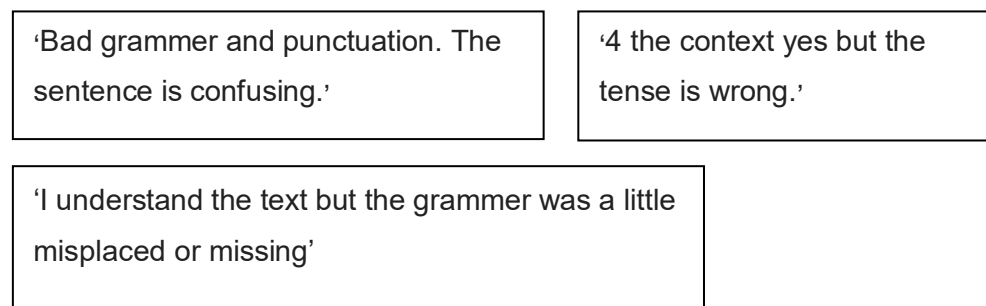


Figure 49: Mistakes in comments

Contractions, punctuation and apostrophes were cited by speakers of English as reasons for rating a post as appropriate for the context. An example of this is 'you'll', but also included informal lexis such as 'spree'. This indicates that speakers of English thought they based their own ratings on the use of the informal register taught (use of abbreviations, punctuation and apostrophes).

The text for question 21 was perceived as least appropriate by the participants in Stage Two. More than one third of Stage Two participants (35%) rated this text as 'incorrect use of language'.

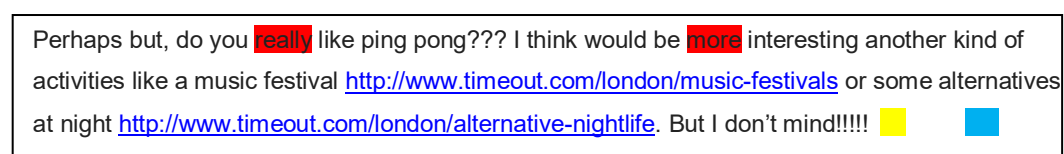


Figure 51: Question 21

The following features of the informal register were identified; one contraction (in yellow), two occurrences of emphatic language (in red), five exclamation marks (in blue), bringing the targeted informal-register features in this post to 24%. The frequency of informal-register features in this text is comparable to the other texts. On further examination, it becomes clear that several grammatical and lexical mistakes were made in this text, as indicated below.

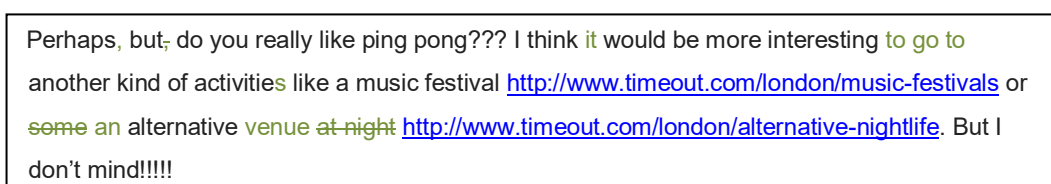


Figure 50: Corrected version question 21

Mistakes were also made in other posts, which suggests that in order for a post to be perceived as appropriate, minor mistakes may be made, but more prominent mistakes will not be so easily overlooked. In the above example, a verb is missing, which makes it difficult to understand the meaning of the text. This affected the perception of Stage Two participants, as indicated in the open comments. By using the word 'alternative' in the context of the sentence above, the post became difficult to understand, and this may have been exacerbated by the inclusion of two web links. In summary, the presence of lexical and grammatical mistakes in the posts explained the lowest ratings of perceived context-appropriateness.

As lexical and grammatical mistakes are linked to language level, this section discusses the relationship between Stage One participants self-declared level of English and perceived context-appropriateness. Language level was (self) assessed twice; both task 1 and task 5 included materials for students to self-assess their language levels in different ways. The outcomes of these assessments are included Table 18.

Table 18: 'Appropriateness of posts' versus language level

Participant Stage One	Percentage rated as 'appropriate for the context' – Preintervention	Percentage rated as 'appropriate for the context' – Postintervention	Change from pre- to postintervention	Self-declared level participant is working at – part of Task 1	Selfdeclared level participant is working at – part of Task 5
Mrs Who	58%	38%	<20%	C1 / B2	Above C2
Canelo	40%	46%	>6%	B2	C2
Eureka	32%	48%	>12%	B2 / C2	B2
Penguin	58%	78%	>20%	C2	C2
Zelda	64%	52%	<12%	C1	Above C2

These self-declared language levels were aligned to the CEFR framework

(Council of Europe, 2011), where A2 is the lowest level and C2 the highest. Students were asked in Task 1 and 5 to self-assess their knowledge and use of English. Task 1 used a quiz developed by the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe, in which students are asked to self-assess their own use of language on a scale between 1 and 10. This was followed by between 10 and 20 questions to assess their listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing skills. An example is provided in Figure 52.

REMOVED FROM ELECTRONIC VERSION

Figure 52: Example assessment task

After the results of the self-assessments, the students' teacher contacted the researcher to discuss the accuracy of these initial assessments. She suggested that the results of the tests were not accurate, as she felt that individual students variously underestimated or indeed overestimated, their own ability. She is an accomplished ESOL teacher as well as an examiner for Cambridge International Examinations, which demonstrates her ability to assess learners in line with international standards. Essentially, higher achieving students consistently underestimate their performance, while the opposite was found for lower achieving students (Karnilowicz, 2012). As a result, the researcher also decided to introduce to the intervention, as part of task 5, a final language assessment task. Self-assessment in task 5 included a multiple-choice quiz, which focused mainly on the use of grammar and spelling. The self-assessment task in task 5 focused more on measuring application of grammar rules, whilst task 1 mainly focused on self-declared language use.

Analysis of self-declared language level and perceived context-appropriateness showed that students with a higher self-declared language level received higher ratings from Stage Two participants. Furthermore, the two students working at the lowest language level (B2) received the lowest rating. These data must necessarily be interpreted with caution, mindful of the fact that this relationship is based upon self-assessed rather than actual language levels. As the self-declared language levels match the overall level of the group (B2 to C2), it is likely that such a relationship exists.

The posts produced by Stage One participants working at a lower level were perceived to be less appropriate for the context, by speakers of English. This is a

key finding because it confirms that perceived context-appropriateness was influenced by the linguistic features in the posts. However, it is not a surprising finding; better knowledge of English is likely to result in fewer mistakes, which in turn was found to positively influence the ratings of speakers of English.

To sum up, the result as to whether the perception of Stage Two participants ('Us') is due to the language produced by Stage One participants ('Them') is not conclusive. The findings of this study have shown that speakers of English believed they considered the register type and features of posts in their judgements, but this is not evident from their ratings. It is clear that grammatical mistakes negatively impact perceived context-appropriateness. A consequence of these findings is that the perceptions of speakers of English are driven by factors other than the linguistic features present in the posts, which will be discussed in the next section.

10.3 The role of 'Us'; a comparison of linguistic features and perceived context-appropriateness

Language proficiency is the determining factor needed to achieve communication goals and avoid communication breakdown (Rossiter, 2009), which in part is corroborated by the findings of this study. The comparison of perceived context-appropriateness and Stage One participants' self-declared language levels showed that posts were perceived inappropriate for the context when grammar or lexical mistakes were made. In other words, communication breaks down due to low language proficiency. However, the posts which were perceived as most appropriate could not be explained by analysis of these linguistic features. In summary, low perceived context-appropriateness can be explained by the texts' linguistic features, whilst these do not explain high perceived context-appropriateness. As a consequence, the ratings of the posts by speakers of English might have originated on factors related to 'the eye of the beholder'.

The way speakers of English perceive communication is important for foreign language education. Traditionally, foreign language learners focussed on developing their own productive skills, whilst this study shows that their use of language only in part contributes to successful communication. The implications of this study are significant for educational practice as development of productive

skills is not sufficient for foreign language learners to evaluate the success of their communication.

The link between lexical and grammar features and perceived context appropriateness is evident from the clear consensus in the way the speakers of English rated some of the posts. In Figure 53, question 23 was perceived almost unanimously by Stage Two participants as ‘appropriate for the context’.

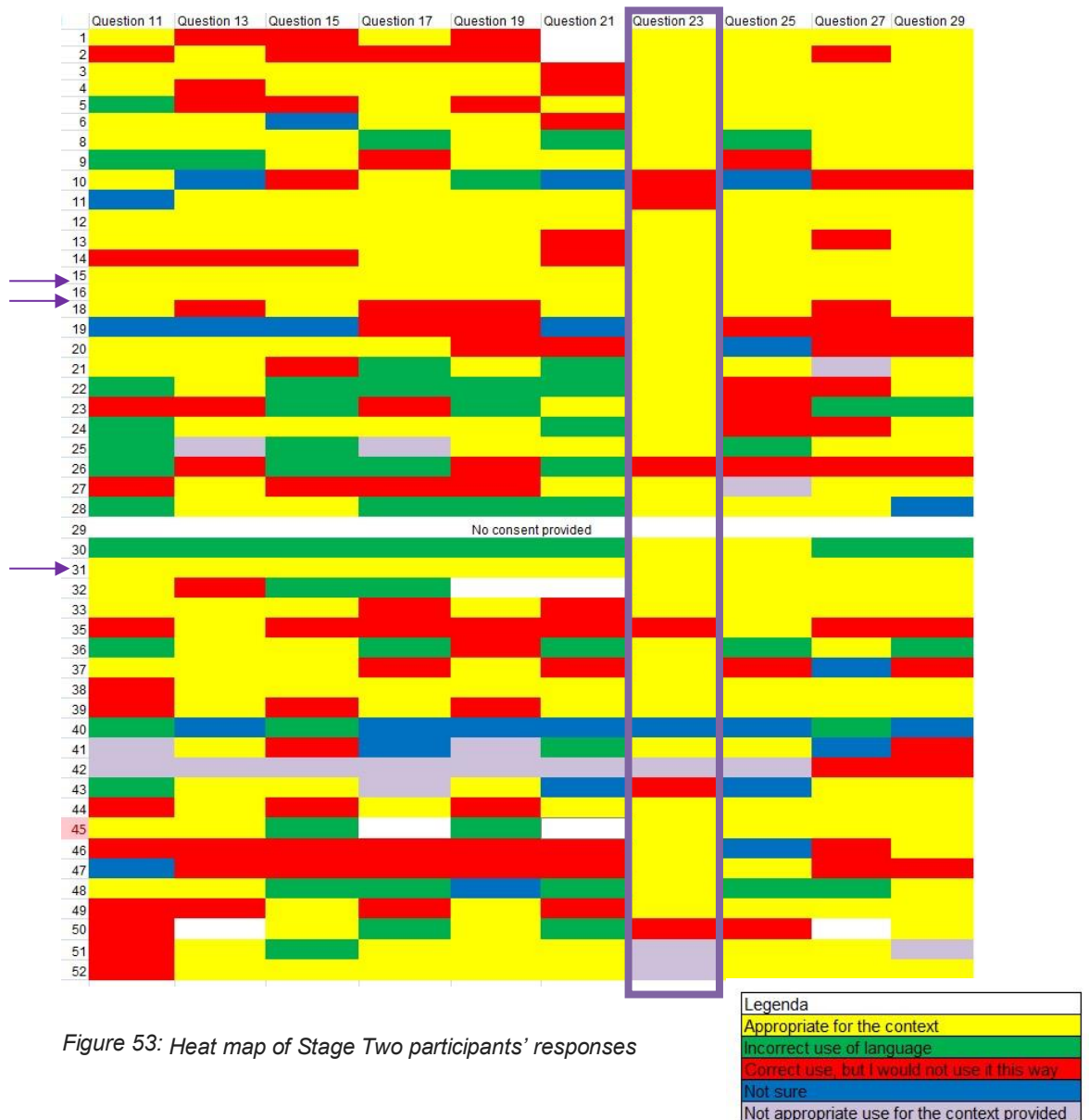


Figure 53: Heat map of Stage Two participants' responses

Figure 53 also shows that patterns emerge horizontally, which means that some participants are more likely to consider a post appropriate for the context than others. This is particularly clear from the answers from participant 15 and 16 for instance, who considered all posts appropriate for the context provided. On the opposite end of the scale, some participants considered none of the posts to be

appropriate: participant 40, for example, was consistently unsure about the posts, or considers them as incorrect use of language.

These individual patterns suggest that there was no overall consensus for all of the posts as to what was considered appropriate. As previously stated, this is a small sample group (n=50), so it is important to replicate this study in a different setting: assuming, however, that replication would lead to similar findings, this is an important finding with crucial implications. It shows that when the texts are error-free, the choices made by the speakers of English in terms of contextappropriateness are not based upon linguistic features but on previous ratings. These individual differences suggest that feedback from one speaker of English might not be sufficient in teaching and assessing the use of the informal register: this finding has significant implications for education practice, in particular in the field of assessment and feedback. To mitigate these individual perceptions, further studies could explore the application of crowdsourcing methods, which relied on the input of a large group of individuals. Crowdsourcing can be used to employ a multitude of humans to help solve a wide variety of problems (Doan, Ramakrishnan and Halevy, 2011) and has been used previously in language education applications.

To sum up, then: the findings discussed suggest that not all speakers of English make the same choices when considering the use of the informal register, suggesting that both 'Them' and 'Us' have an impact upon the perception of the use of the informal register. The next section will explore the factors relating to characteristics which impacted upon the perceptions of the Stage Two participants.

10.4 Which aspects of 'Us' determine our view of 'appropriateness'?

To consider the variables which impacted Stage Two participants' views of context-appropriateness, analysis of the sociolinguistic characteristics within that group took place. Variables known to have an impact on language use - including age, gender and mother tongue (Holmes, Meyerhoff and Romaine, 2003) - were analysed. In addition to these variables, the researcher also hypothesized that prior use of social networking sites would impact upon perceived context-appropriateness as discussed in section 10.4.3.

10.4.1 The impact of age on views of ‘appropriateness’

The age of the participants in Stage Two was captured in the questionnaire, which was compared to perceived context-appropriateness through a t-test. In corroboration of the literature, a highly significant negative correlation was found between age and perceived context-appropriateness as the Paired Sample correlation is $-.816$ and significant as $p=.221$. As age is a well-known characteristic which influences language use, this was not a surprising finding; the consequences of this finding, however, are numerous. As teachers are generally older than the students they assess, they are more likely than other, younger speakers of English, to assess posts as contextually less appropriate.

10.4.2 The impact of knowledge of Spanish on perceptions of appropriateness

Knowledge of other languages is also shown to have an influence on language use (Holmes, Meyerhoff and Romaine, 2003). Figure 54 reveals that those participants in Stage Two who had knowledge of Spanish rated the posting data as more appropriate than the participant group overall. A significant difference was found in the way the participants with knowledge of Spanish answered the questions, they utilised ‘not sure’ much less than the participants overall, $t = 2.5$, $p = 0.03$. Questions 23 and 29 show the biggest difference in responses between those with knowledge of Spanish, and the rest of the participants.

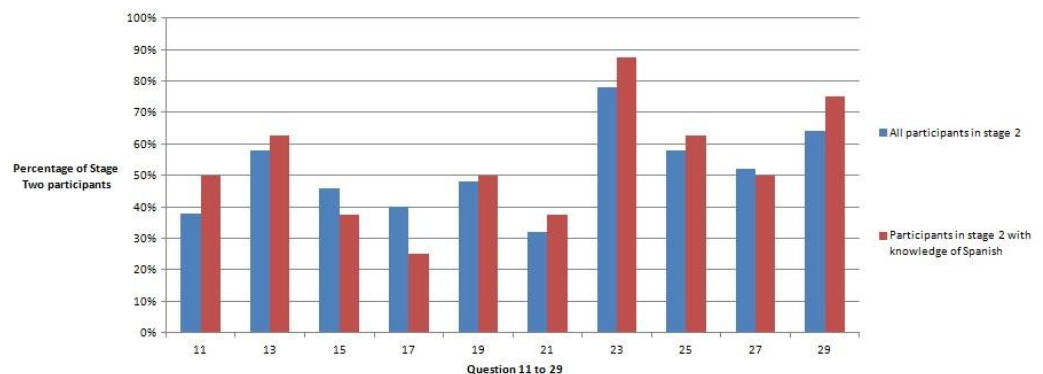


Figure 54: Comparison of Stage Two participants and those with knowledge of Spanish

Detailed analysis of the text in post 23 and 29 showed the presence of emphatic language in both posts, which is more common in Spanish speakers than English speakers (Crosson et al., 2012), as emphatic language over time disappeared in modern English (Killie, 2014). The use of emphatic language in posts is therefore likely to explain the differences in perceived

contextappropriateness between the speakers of English with knowledge of Spanish and the rest of the Stage Two participants.

10.4.3 The impact of prior use of social networking sites on perceptions of appropriateness

This study found that prior use of social networking sites indeed had a 'familiar ring to it'. Unsurprisingly, analysis of perceived context-appropriateness showed that the speakers of English who were familiar with social networking sites, rated posts more favourably. Furthermore, the group of speakers of English without prior use of social networking sites were less likely to consider a post as 'appropriate for the context'. Those without prior use of social networking sites were also more likely to rate a post as 'not sure' or 'incorrect use of language' which indicates that they favoured the use of the formal register, or 'Standard English'. This finding is not surprising, as familiarity is associated with positive perception (Bohrn et al., 2013) but is still very important in considering the role of language teachers in the dedicated instruction of the informal language. As this study found that teachers without prior use of social networking sites had a different perception to the rest of the participants, the way that they teach, assess and provide feedback influences the language used by their students. In turn, students model their use of language on that of their teacher, according to the results of this study, it is likely that the language used by their teacher not representative of that of the speakers of English. This is problematic as unmodulated use of Standard English sets people apart from the community in an uncomfortable way (Turner, 2009). The approach these teachers could produce students whose language does not conform to the implicit rules of society, which could impact on interaction and ultimately, integration.

10.4.4 The impact of profession on perceptions of appropriateness

To comply with ethical guidelines but also model academic practice to Stage Two participants in preparation for their own research project, the researcher provided a guest lecture for all Stage Two participants. In these sessions, Stage Two participants were given information about the study and had the opportunity to ask questions. Stage Two participants were given the opportunity to participate in the study and questionnaires could be completed either in the session or at home. Many of the Stage Two participants completed their questionnaires in these sessions.

The researcher kept notes of observations made during the information sessions provided to the Stage Two participants, including the following:

"28th of November 2014 – final group. Again, students that teach languages or functional skills seem to have more difficulty in completing the questionnaire. They find it really difficult to 'assess' the language without correcting or commenting on spelling and grammar."

The diary entry suggests that those students who study to become teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages, or those who train to teach such functional skills as English, Maths and ICT, found it harder to assess the language on the basis of its communicative function.

This finding could in part be explained by the need for language teachers to focus on 'correct form'. Johnson and Jackson (2006) found that teachers often treat mistakes as if they were errors. According to Johnson and Jackson (2006): there is a difference between 'errors' and 'mistakes' (2006), with the former being faulty or incomplete knowledge, and the latter the result of operating under significant constraint. An advanced learner who uses 'less' instead of 'fewer' is making a mistake as the learner will have been taught the grammatical reason for using 'fewer'; incorrect use by an elementary learner, however, would be classified as a mere error: "Asking learners to reproduce mistakes is a procedure that is likely to be anathema to many language teachers who feel that the production of wrong forms should be avoided at all costs" (Johnson and Jackson, 2006, p543). This might be true, but, allowing the learner to reproduce the mistake in order to avoid these in the future, is helpful. The need to avoid wrong forms may be one of the reasons why teachers of English have a different perception in relation to informal language in comparison to other speakers of English.

As the link between perceived context-appropriateness and profession was an unexpected finding, the questionnaire did not ask Stage Two participants to indicate their profession, or the subject which they chose to teach. This lack of data means that this study cannot investigate whether teachers of English and ESOL rated posts more or less positively compared to the rest of Stage Two participants.

Further research would be needed to substantiate the analysis of these observation notes, indicating that English teachers' perception of informal register

appropriateness is not representative of wider society. At the time of writing, no research had been undertaken to investigate this issue, but the attitudes of teachers of English in relationship to World Englishes has been widely reported. Yiakoumetti (2010) suggests that teacher training programmes would benefit from including a range of linguistic variation, whilst Jenkins (2006) suggests that there is still limited uptake of World English and English as a Lingua Franca by TESOL practitioners.

10.4.5 The impact of mother tongue on perceptions of appropriateness

Over the years, new technologies have been introduced which have had an impact upon the way language changes over time: and yet it is still the case that language teaching employs traditional methods which focus on 'form' rather than on discussion. Further, the findings in this study indicate that language teachers might perceive context-appropriateness differently to other speakers of English. The previous section talked about the impact that the perceptions of English language teachers might have on the language of their students, and these findings are corroborated by the comments produced by the Stage Two participants, reproduced in Figure 55.



Figure 55: non-native speakers' comments

The two comments reflect the desire not to use slang, but rather to demonstrate 'correct' use of English. It is clear that these participants are native speakers of other languages – English is not their mother tongue.

These findings will need to be treated with caution as further research is needed to validate them, based as they are upon comments rather than statistical analysis: these, and other limitations of the study methodology, will be discussed in the next section.

10.5 Limitations relating to the method utilised in Stage Two of the study

The limitations of the methodology need to be considered in tandem with the findings discussed in this chapter. As already mentioned, the questionnaire distributed to Stage Two participants was designed to capture limited demographic data. The limited introduction of demographic data was required to minimise the questionnaire length. In hindsight, profession or subject taught would have been a useful addition to the questionnaire, as the findings of this study suggest that these might have influenced the study's findings. Further research which compares perceptions of English and ESOL teachers versus other speakers of English would answer some of the remaining questions regarding perceived context-appropriateness.

The questionnaire design was based upon recommendations included in the academic literature; the use of five answer options, for instance. However, the order of the questions for the questionnaire was fixed, whilst randomised questions are often common in online questionnaires. The findings indicate that the last question of the questionnaire (29) was rated as most appropriate. As the question order was fixed, the ratings for question 29 might be attributed to the need for Stage Two participants to finish, which could have led to quicker, less considered decisions.

This may mean these answers might have been different if the question had been placed earlier in the questionnaire. Clearly, this was not anticipated in the original design, but random allocation of question order in future studies would avoid this issue.

10.6 Summary

This chapter discussed the unusual form of interaction which took place between the Stage One participants ('Them') and Stage Two participants ('Us'). Stage One participants sent their messages by producing posts in the intervention study: these were received by Stage Two participants ('Us') who rated these posts, and their evaluations are in this study referred to as 'perceived contextappropriateness'. Two factors in respect of Stage One participants were found to have an impact on perceived context-appropriateness: (i) grammatical and lexical mistakes made in the posts and (ii) self-declared language level.

These two factors explained those posts that were perceived as not appropriate; there was no consensus regarding the posts which were found to be appropriate for the context. Factors which played a role included (i) personal preference, (ii) age, (iii) knowledge of Spanish, (iv) profession and (v) prior use of social networking sites. The limitations of the method, mainly related to the survey design have been outlined. The chapter concluded with suggestions for further research to address some of the limitations described in the chapter.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

11.1 Introduction

In today's society, such complex issues as the encountering of language barriers when accessing public services or employment, are associated with sociocultural integration. These issues are a key concern for policy makers, with farreaching implications for home and foreign-language policies. Use of the informal register is crucial in order to connect with others, impacting on the individual's personal and professional life and ultimately, their role in society (Harizah and Suhaila, 2013; Heritage and Clayman, 2010).

This thesis is the product of a research project spanning almost five years, designed by a published researcher (Toetenel, 2014; Rienties and Toetenel, 2016; Rienties, Toetenel and Bryan, 2015; Toetenel and Rienties, 2016c; Toetenel and Rienties, 2016a) with practical experience of teaching English to native, second- and foreign-language learners in the UK, and with decades of personal experience of the complexities associated with societal integration. Consequently, the implications for practice, theory, policy and methodology detailed in this chapter are extensive. A summary of the strengths and limitations of the study focuses particularly on the original contributions to knowledge that this study brings to the field, before concluding with a set of recommendations for further research.

11.2 The research questions

The overall research question for this project was:

Does dedicated classroom instruction in the use of the informal register, delivered through social networking sites, influence students' communicative

interactions as measured through linguistic analysis and the perceptions of a sample of speakers of English?

This overarching research questions can be divided into the following subquestions, the implications of these are reported in this chapter.

1. How did students use the targeted features of the informal language, as measured at the beginning and end of the intervention study?
2. What impact did the study have on students' communicative interactions with their peers?
3. Which factors influenced the ways in which speakers of English perceived the appropriateness of the posts generated during Stage One of the study?

11.3 Implications for research

There are five main methodological implications from the findings of the study. The first relates to the overall method employed in the study, whilst the other four relate to the methods of data gathering and analysis employed in the study.

The first implication relates to the way in which this study fully encompassed the teaching cycle, from identifying a gap in the curriculum, to the design of the framework and associated teaching materials based upon the academic literature. The intervention study delivered the teaching materials in an innovative manner, and gathered and analysed qualitative and quantitative data from both a linguistic and a recipients' perspective to measure its impact. Finally, the researcher evaluated the framework and teaching material utilised in this study before making recommendations for teachers, researchers, and policy makers.

The different stages of the study and its use of the data is illustrated in Figure 6.

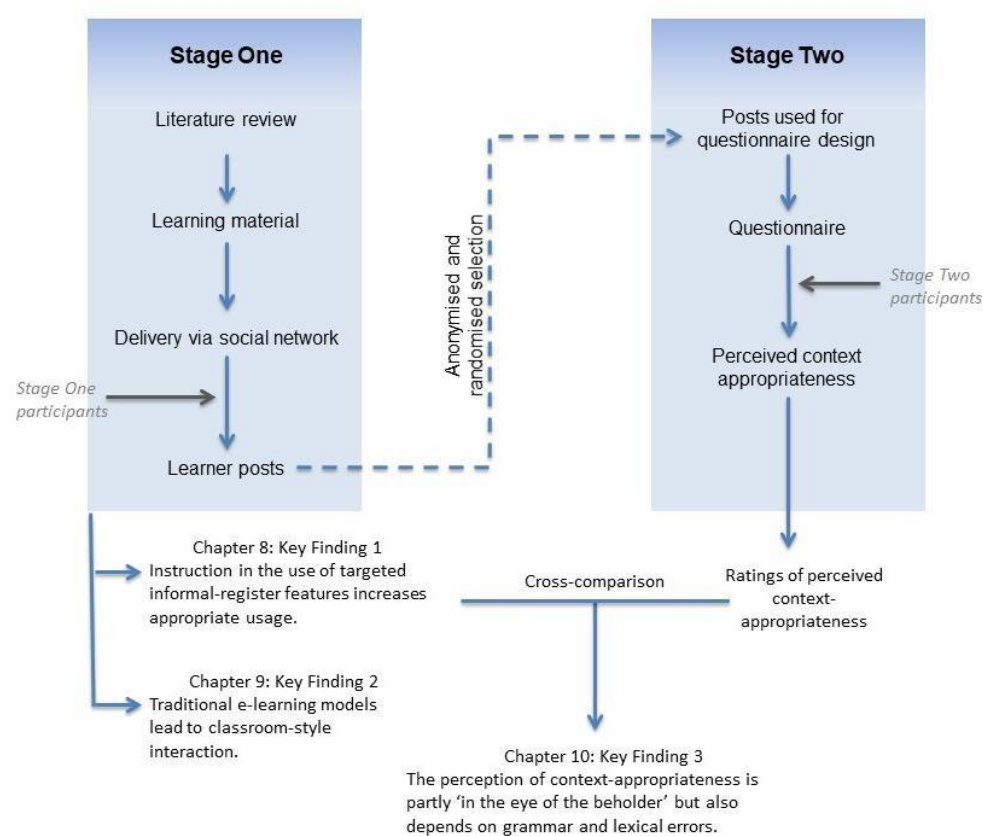


Figure 6: Overview of the intervention

Whilst the holistic approach utilised in this study is common in small-scale action research projects, the scope of action research is often limited. The main advantage of utilising the entire teaching cycle is that due to its holistic approach, the researcher ascertains a complete overview of the implications of the different elements on the findings of the study. For example, the observations during the gathering of questionnaires completed by Stage Two participants could have easily been missed, had the researcher only focused on the linguistic element of the study.

The second implication relates to the linguistic tagging methods utilised for data analysis in Stage One of the study. The study employed various linguistic taggers combined with a manual process to analyse the linguistic features present in the posts. Chapter 6 outlined the benefits of using MAT and CLAWS followed by a manual tagging process. The implication of this combined data analysis method secures both the advantages of using a standardised, replicable automatic approach, enhanced by manual improving the data quality. One of the disadvantages of using automatic taggers is that the features itself are recognised (e.g. punctuation marks), but not their function within the corpus. For

example, the use of exclamation marks is common at the end of a sentence in various registers, but exclamation marks are also used to add emphasis to a sentence in the informal register. An automatic tagger cannot distinguish between these two examples, which is all data was also manually checked.

The third implication of the methodology utilised in this study relates to the purpose of using social networking sites. At present, social networking sites are used mainly in education as a tool to communicate about classroom activities. Students use the sites to share notes and discuss answers to homework exercises (Clark, 2009). Whilst the use of social networking sites in education has been widely reported in the last few years, the pedagogical aim is often not stated. In most cases, social networking tools are employed as a bolt-on, whilst in this study, Ning was a fundamental part of the learning process itself. The affordances of social networking sites aligned to the purpose of the study, and the theory employed (Sociocultural theory). Ning was chosen from a range of social networking sites available, as discussed in chapter 6, mainly for privacy and security purposes. It is important to highlight the pedagogical use of online media in research studies, as the pedagogical aim directly impacts on the validity of associated findings.

The fourth implication is the use of a fine-grained Learning Design analysis of the teaching materials provided to evaluate the pedagogical aims employed.

This is an important implication as a gap has been identified between intended and delivered learning materials in this study, in line with the academic literature (Cross et al., 2012; Toetenel and Rienties, 2016c). As this current chapter argued, the pedagogical aim and associated activities are important when considering the findings of an intervention. Further studies could enhance their validity by evaluating the material for their intervention using a fine-grained Learning Design analysis, as employed in this study.

The fifth implication relates to the use of online, remote recruitment of participants, which not only had practical benefits for this study, but also increased its validity, as no prior contact had taken place between the researcher and the participants. As outlined in Chapter 6, the researcher used an academic network, Eurocall, to outline the aim and benefits of the study and invited interested parties to respond; the owner of School X in Spain responded positively. The method of online recruitment offers major methodological

implications, as the pool of participants is likely to be more extensive and diverse. Furthermore, remote schools, which traditionally operate without links to universities, can also benefit from participation in online research.

To sum up, the implications for methodology discussed are:

- The holistic design of the study encompasses the entire teaching cycle, which provides a more holistic view of the research findings.
- A combination of automatic and manual linguistic tagging methods supports validity and quality of data.
- The pedagogical purpose for the use of media facilitates opportunities for evaluation and review.
- Use of a fine-grained Learning Design analysis of teaching materials enables evaluation of the pedagogical aims employed.
- Use of online, remote recruitment of participants increases research validity.

11.4 Theoretical Implications

The literature review and findings of the study have five main theoretical implications: (i) register use needs to be taught to foreign-language learners, (ii) use of traditional e-learning models lead to classroom-style interaction, (iii) contributors need to be classified as 'lurkers', 'posters', and 'responders' to better describe interaction on a social networking site, (iv) development of a British web-based corpus is desirable, and (v) an appropriate balance of informal register features on social networking sites was noted. Each of these implications will now be dealt with in turn.

The first implication for theory is that the use of the informal register needs more attention in the foreign-language classroom and needs to be taught to foreign language learners, at more advanced as well as more basic language levels. The results of the intervention demonstrated that dedicated instruction of informal-register features both increased their frequency of use and changed the way these features were used (Key Finding 1). As informal-register features are only one example of register use, further studies utilising discourse analysis should focus on identifying transferable register features and their application. Further studies could focus on the extent of which informal language is culturally

specific. and whether social networking creates a kind of 'esperanto'/shared culture of informal language.

The second implication for theory in this study relates to task design. The study was designed using a theoretical framework based upon the five-stage model developed by Salmon (2004, p29), which is widely used in online education and training. The model used in this study was adapted from Salmon (2004, p29) by linking it to the content of the task as displayed in Figure 56. Task design in this study was linear, and associated expectations are outlined for each of the stages of the study.

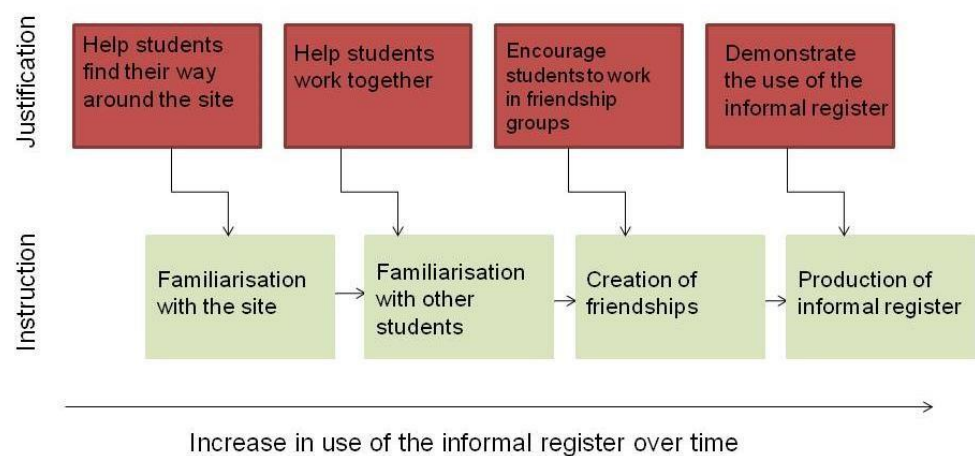


Figure 56: Task design which incorporates the informal register in social networking sites

Key Finding 2 revealed that the use of a linear, traditional e-learning model, such as the one proposed by Salmon (2004), was associated with traditional classroom-style interaction. The focus of the model is helpful in achieving different competencies in the learning process, through the development of different stages (access; online socialisation; information exchange; knowledge construction, and development). However, these are insufficient when employed in a linear fashion, as the model suggests. A more appropriate model was proposed by Teixeira et al. (2016), which aligned more closely to the study's intentions and findings, by encouraging autonomous and self-directed learning. The focus on peer-to-peer interaction here makes learning experiences richer and more rewarding. However, at the time of the current study's design (2010), this model was not yet available.

The third implication is that Open Online courses often classify learners as either 'posters' or 'lurkers' as discussed in Chapter 10. This study has found that this

distinction is largely unhelpful, as all students posted in response to the learning materials and the teacher, but also 'lurked' inasmuch as that they often chose not to post in response to their peers. The findings of this study suggest that this categorisation is not sufficient in identifying the interactions present in the online classroom. It would be more helpful to group these interactions into three categories: responders, posters and lurkers. Lurkers do not contribute to the online community, but stay 'silent' all the time (Sun, Rau and Ma, 2014). Responders are those students that post responses to posts of their peers, whilst posters interact with the learning materials, but not with the views of the community around them. This new, more nuanced distinction is an original contribution to knowledge identified by the researcher as a result of this study.

The fourth implication for theory in this study is related to the features of the informal register (contractions, emphatic language, exclamation marks, informal nouns and abbreviations). The informal-register features were based on Biber's work (1995). The findings of the study indicated that informal-register frequency increased post-intervention, as an average (n=15) and for each of the individual participants analysed (n=5). The study found that the frequency of the informalregister features was lower than found in oral communication. Whilst researchers in the fields of corpus linguistics and sociolinguistics have studied the informal and formal register features widely, the main body of research predates social networking sites. Consequently, at the time of writing, there was no corpus that could provide information about the features used or the frequency in which they occur on social networking sites. Furthermore, scholarship in this area has not considered practical uses of the features identified through corpus linguistics, including how this might benefit language learners and teachers. This study found that the language utilised on the social networking site was distinct, as it featured a lower frequency of informal-register features compared to oral communication, though it included features of text talk such as extensive use of punctuation. As such, the researcher therefore called this use of English on a social networking site 'Sminglish', a new form of hybrid language. As no British web corpus is available, further research is required to validate the findings outlined in this study and identify the expected frequency of these informalregister features in asynchronous messages. In addition, the features of the informal register (contractions; emphatic language; exclamation marks; informal nouns, and abbreviations) investigated by this study are not exhaustive; it is possible, then, that additional features appear in texts on social

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networking sites which define their appropriateness and purpose. Studies should be commissioned employing the informal register, especially studies aiming to analyse informal-register features using web-based modes of communication, to better understand the linguistic complexities of language used on the internet.

The fifth implication for theory refers to the perceptions of participants in Stage Two which were found to be correlated to demographic variables and the experiences of participants in that group. For instance, a correlation was found between Stage Two participants' knowledge of Spanish and the way in which they rated the posts produced by Stage One participants. If these correlations are validated in further, larger scale studies, the appropriateness of a particular phrase may not just depend on the person sending the message but also on the person receiving the message and their perceptions, which needs to be considered in foreign-language education theories.

To sum up, the implications for theory discussed are:

- Use of the informal register needs to be taught as it is not transferable between languages.
- The suitability of linear, traditional e-learning models, such as Salmon's (2004), needs to be reconsidered to increase learner interaction
- Interaction in the classroom can be divided in three categories: responders, posters and lurkers.
- Frequency of the informal-register features in posts was lower than found in oral communication, e.g. a new form of hybrid language: Sminglish.
- Web-based studies should be commissioned employing the informal register to better understand the linguistic complexities of language used on the internet.
- Demographic variables and experiences may influence perceptions of speakers which should be considered in foreign-education theories.

11.5 Implications for policy

This study investigated the relationships between dedicated instruction of the informal register, the use of social networking sites, and perceptions of speakers of English. These topics have largely been ignored by policy makers and possibly as a result also by researchers and teachers. Three policy implications have been identified and need to be implemented to support further research and practice regarding the informal register in foreign language education, as outlined below.

The first policy implication relates to the need to include the informal register in the foreign language curriculum at all ability levels. To date, the curriculum for second language learners has not recognised the importance of instruction in the use of the informal register for intermediate or advanced learners, though it would support their ability to communicate with peers for work or study. And this is even more salient as social integration relies on these types of interpersonal communication. The findings of the study reveal that the informal register needs to be taught and that instruction improves appropriate use. Consequently, policy makers should encourage instruction of the informal register by including this as a requirement in formal assessments such as the 'Life in the United Kingdom Test' and the 'International English Language Testing System' (IELTS).

The second policy implication concerns the use of social networking sites for teaching, rather than for general educational use. The educational use of social networking sites has also received limited attention from academics, although in recent years there has been an increase in the number of studies reporting their use (Lim and Richardson, 2016). However, the literature review showed that scholarship on the use of social networking sites for teaching purposes has been limited. The literature review also demonstrated that the affordances of social networking sites are best exploited when an appropriate approach to pedagogical task design is applied. Policy makers should not only require the use of social networking sites to be included in all educational curricula, but also include instruction in their use in all teacher training materials to ensure that teaching methods exploit associated affordances.

To sum up, the implications for policy are as follows:

- The use of the informal register should be included in formal assessments such as the 'Life in the United Kingdom Test' and the 'International English Language Testing System' (IELTS).
- Policy makers should ensure that policy requires teachers to be trained in the use of social networking sites so that their affordances can be exploited.

11.6 Implications for practice

This section focuses on the study's implications for educational practice, and is essentially a call for practitioners to critically examine their beliefs and approaches to the use of the informal register. In response to research question 3, the study found that the use of the informal register varies wildly, and that the beliefs and approaches of language teachers are likely to be different from those of the rest of the population. It is therefore important that practitioners endeavour to consider their own beliefs prior to assessing texts from their students.

From the outset, this study highlighted the importance of informal interaction in foreign-language education. In particular, it focused on dedicated instruction of the informal-register features. The literature review discussed the academic research with regards to register; this is a complex problem, and one in which there is a marked lack of scholarly consensus. This is not helped by the increasing speed of change in communication methods. This study employed the most widely used definition of 'register' (Natalya and Alina, 2016) as: "a variety of language, chosen by the user from a range of varieties, suited for particular situations" (Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens, 1964). These situations occur regularly in daily life, and so the informal register is used in all social interactions. Further, the use of the informal register has increased over time (Biber, Gray and Poonpon, 2011). Register variety needs to be taught so that learners can choose an appropriate register, particularly as register use is highly relative and can be misleading when applied to specific settings and discourse types (GiménezMoreno, 2011). Academic studies with foreign- and second-language learners have shown that register choice and use is not instinctive for these learners (Leedham and Cai, 2013; Hinkel, 2003b). Instinctive use might occur in first language acquisition, but the use of formality and informality is not transferable between languages. In the UK, for instance, it is common - even in the context of business - to address recipients of emails by first name, as the English language produced in the UK employs relatively informal language

(Crystal, 2011). In comparison, in countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Switzerland, formality in emails depends on the relationship between the sender and receiver. In many cases, this means that the language used in emails is more formal. The difference between register use in emails is one example of why language learners need to recognise, understand, and appropriately use the sociolinguistic features of discourse (Van Compernelle, 2009).

Register variety is generally not explicitly taught in advanced stages of foreignlanguage education: the informal register is only taught in the elementary stages of foreign-language education, whilst the use of the informal register is mostly in evidence at advanced levels, when interacting with other speakers of the target language. Unlike native speakers however, foreign-language learners are not immersed in the target language. For these learners, limited interaction with native speakers makes it difficult for language to occur naturally and misuse can result in awkward, inappropriate usage, resulting in loss of prestige and authority.

This study's nine original contributions to the field are included in section 11.9., as it encourages practitioners to reconsider their overall approach to language teaching in line with education and societal changes. Traditionally, language has been taught in a manner closely resembling a natural science approach, where students can produce 'right' or 'wrong' answers (Cal Varela, 2010). Whilst educational practice states that clear instruction is important for learners to master the target language, not all aspects of language learning have clear rules (Erwin, 2001). Discussion is more frequently encountered in other educational topics, than in language learning. Overall, language learning is mainly teacherled, whilst in a modern classroom, students are expected to discuss and bring their expertise into the mix (Cal Varela, 2010). This study found that particular types of lexis are flexible and largely dependent on personal preference. These results imply that discussions about lexis and grammar use are valuable, as they enable learners to develop a better understanding of the appropriateness of register use, and so enable sense-making (McGregor, 2007). The findings of this study encourage foreign language teachers to embed debate around the use of lexis, grammar and informality in their classrooms.

This study also found a relationship between grammatical and lexical mistakes in the posts on the one hand, and perceived context-appropriateness on the other.

This finding was corroborated by the relationship found between the selfdeclared language level of the participants and the perceptions of speakers of English. This is an unsurprising but important finding, as it reinforces the importance of spelling and grammar in written communication. This finding could be used by foreign-language teachers to motivate their students to improve their grammar, as the study found that mistakes in grammar led to a breakdown in communication.

The study also found that simply focusing on 'right' forms is inadequate, as the 'right' form for the language teacher may not be 'right' for other people with whom the learner interacts. Applications such as Duo Lingo might be able to provide more robust feedback on informal-register use as they combine input from many people to produce feedback. Duo Lingo is a web-based languagelearning application: its content is produced by its users' translations of simple sentences (Savage, 2012). Currently Duo Lingo is not effective in teaching more complex structures such as the informal register, but the use of crowd sourcing could provide immediate, more balanced feedback on the learner's performance. The use of applications such as Duo Lingo should therefore be encouraged by foreign language teachers.

Other studies have found evidence to suggest that particular features also associated with the informal register, such as abbreviations and acronyms, are not always used by English native speakers in online settings. Stapa and Shaari (2012, p826) state that: "it is significantly proven that acronyms might be a common feature in online communicative language but the use is actually not preferred by most English native speakers in various online communication settings". These authors suggest that some speakers of English prefer not to use features of the language that are indeed common practice, reinforcing the need to ensure that feedback to students is provided by multiple entities rather than individual preference.

To sum up, the implications for practice discussed are:

- Instruction in the use of the informal register needs to be included in all levels of foreign language teaching.
- Instruction in the use of informal-register features should include discussion and consider processes involved in oral and written communication

- Assessment of the informal register should be undertaken by a range of speakers of English.

11.7 Originality and claims for significance

Innovation in learning and teaching was central to the study, and this section will summarise the nine original elements introduced in this study.

First, the study identified and addressed a gap in language-learning practice. The United Kingdom's ESOL curriculum does not specify the need to utilise the informal register, instead it refers to 'different styles of writing for different purposes' (Department for Education and Skills, 2000) as outlined in the literature review. Although the use of the informal register is widely used in the foreign-language classroom, the researcher has not found any studies which focus on the linguistic use of the informal register features when teaching advanced students. This education-based linguistic approach would benefit practitioners teaching English in the second and foreign-language classroom.

Second, the study's development of bespoke teaching material is an original contribution to the foreign-language education field, for these will be employed as open educational resources upon production of the thesis.

Third, the adapted model for task design informed by e-learning, ESOL and webbased instructional frameworks is another contribution to knowledge in the field.

This contribution is further enhanced by the evaluation of the model's effectiveness based upon the study's finding, as discussed in Chapter 10.

Fourth, the deliberate integration of specific pedagogical aims in the design and use of Ning was innovative, especially at the time when the field work took place, as many teachers introduce social media in the classroom without capitalising fully or deliberately on their educational affordances (Whyte and Alexander, 2014).

Fifth, the study built on studies investigating hybrid and interlanguage, as discussed in the literature review. It identified features of a new hybrid language used by foreign-language learners, which utilised features of both written and oral communication in an original manner, which the researcher called Sminglish.

Sixth, the use of a fine-grained Learning Design analysis to evaluate the learning materials to explain the study's findings is also an original element of the study. Although much has been written about Learning Design, and even though the fine-grained Learning Design analysis is common practice at the Open University in the development and quality-assurance of learning materials, the researcher has not found any in-depth research studies which have implemented a similar approach to interrogate online language-teaching approaches.

Seventh, the use of a combined linguistic tagging approach of two automatic taggers enhanced by a manual tagging approach provided additional validity to the study findings. The employed approach is an original contribution to the field, as it identifies features previously identified as part of a cluster, rather than the individual feature. This is particularly important for the use of exclamation marks, as these are an indicator of web-based language, whilst other forms of punctuation do not fulfil the same function.

Eighth, the use of Stage Two participants was unique to this study. The researcher has not found any studies to date which have used speakers of the target language to provide feedback on the use of linguistic features, at the time of this study. In this study, Stage Two participants were asked to provide their perceptions regarding the appropriateness of the language developed by Stage One participants. The perceptions of Stage Two participants were contrasted with analysis of the informal register features present in the posts, measuring the theoretical and practical impact of the intervention.

Finally, a sociogram was used to interact on the social networking site, 'Ning'. This sociogram considered the graphically visualised interactions produced by Stage One participants. This analysis resulted in categorisation of interaction by participants (responders, posters and lurkers), which is a new contribution to knowledge.

11.8 Strengths of the study

The strengths of this study lie mainly in its innovative, cross-disciplinary approach, based upon strong foundations in the academic literature. The topic of the study is significant, as it supports the integration of foreign-language learners in society. This is highly relevant at a time when migration in Europe is at its highest rate since the second world war (Rothman and Ronk, 2015). The study's focus on the use of the informal language has been neglected in second

language education. The study is not only timely, but it also addresses a structural gap in the foreign-language curriculum, which can have dire consequences for the individuals involved and thereupon for society as a whole. The teaching material developed, and the use of social networking sites for teaching the informal register, are all highly innovative and will offer lasting benefits to foreign-language learners. Furthermore, recent studies on the use of social networking sites have not yet filled the research gap identified in the literature review, as these studies mainly focus on communication about learning (Young, 2011; Zourou, 2012), rather than learning itself. Therefore, this study is timely, and of importance to society whilst confronting a research gap not yet addressed by other studies.

The methodology for the study design, its data collection and methods of data analysis, are based upon established theoretical frameworks. However, they are employed in innovative ways by combining various methods; for example, when using a combination of automatic and manual linguistic tagging methods. In other cases, methods have been adapted, for instance the adaptation of Salmon's (2004) model for task design. Just as in Salmon's (2004) model, the adapted model include the various stages that students have to work through before they can access the 'learning' but it did not include development, where participants look for more benefits from the system to achieve personal goals. Another example was the selection of linguistic features taught in the study, as two of these were selected based on Biber's (1995) research, namely contractions and abbreviations. Rather than teach all 67 linguistic features identified by Biber (1995), the study focused on an overview of the informal register and emphatic language in addition to the two features earlier mentioned.

Furthermore, in addition to the study's foundations in the academic literature, the study approach has been informed by the researcher's teaching experience and ESOL educational practice. The study employed practical skills-based approaches (Pitt, 2005) whilst the task design was based upon a web-based instruction model by Jung (2001). The web-based employment of the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), required an innovative solution in order to develop 'speaking', which was undertaken on the social networking site. The dedicated practice of Sminglish is unique to this study.

A final strength of the study is the utilisation of external expertise to validate its learning materials and findings. For example, all learning activities were

reviewed by a range of ESOL instructors and the two supervisors overseeing the study. A native Spanish researcher reviewed the literature chapter relating to the Spanish linguistic landscape. In terms of data analysis, a statistical modeller reviewed the use of statistical data in the study, whilst experienced Learning Design practitioners reviewed the Learning Design analysis. The originality of the study's concept, design, implementation, findings and evaluation were validated by the use of these external experts.

11.9 Limitations of the study

The requirements of doctoral study can entail limitations to a study, as doctoral studies need to be undertaken by an individual researcher, rather than by a complete research team. As a result, the researcher undertook several roles in this study: task creator; teacher; mentor; researcher and assessor. The use of different roles could potentially compromise the overall validity of the study, due to the risk of these 'different hats' influencing each other. For instance, the knowledge associated with the researcher role might bias those occupying the assessor role. This limitation was mitigated in the study through the online recruitment of participants; use of external sources of expertise to review study materials; and the use of Stage Two participants to review the posts, in addition to the researcher.

The second limitation relates to the time span of the intervention study. Language development is consistently changed in response to interaction and context (Sockett, 2013), which means that whilst the assessment process provided an indication of the effect of the intervention, these short term measurements could only provide a limited view of its effectiveness. Time constraints such as these are normally associated with doctoral studies, as these are time-bound and, as a result, the time-scale in which the intervention study took place was limited to five tasks, completed within a six-week period. The limited time span for the study must be considered when evaluating its findings and implications.

Chapter 5 has already addressed the limitations associated with the employment of a one-group pretest-posttest design. Individual findings from this preliminary study could be replicated using a larger, randomly-selected population to reduce potential sampling errors and increase external validity.

11.10 Recommendations for further study

As this was an exploratory study, the individual findings would benefit from validation through replication in further studies, ideally using larger populations, random sampling and control groups. Studies which employ dedicated instruction of the informal register could employ explicit and non-explicit instruction of the informal-register features to identify the advantages and disadvantages of both methods, and the impact on the production of the informal-register features post-intervention.

Perceptions of informal-register use by English teachers would benefit from further research, which could be applied to assessment in education. As assessments are typically validated by colleagues in the field, studies which utilise teachers of other subjects to validate assessment decisions would be welcomed. The same would apply for prior experience in using social networking sites and associated assessment decisions. The development of appropriate instruction models for open online courses, focused on peer interaction and learning, would also support future studies and further enhance evaluation methods.

Studies which contribute to the development of a web-based English corpus would be of benefit to the field, as these would enable others to validate text against such a benchmark. The combination of full-forms and contractions within the same texts, as present in Sminglish, could be validated once such a corpus was established.

11.11 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the thesis by discussing the implications and contributions of the study for practice, theory, and policy. It outlines the strengths and limitations of the study, before providing recommendations for further research. It was argued in this chapter that use of the informal register is necessary, as the degree to which more formal language is used, changes from language to language. The appropriate use of language improves social interaction, which is important not only for the language learner, but also for society in general. Use of the informal register is timely, due to its impact on society in general, as socio-cultural integration is a key concern for policy makers. The study made ten innovative contributions to the foreign-language

education, linguistic- and e-learning fields, with recommendations for teachers, researcher and policy makers. In terms of practice, the introduction of dedicated instruction of the informal-register features will enhance social integration. This is particularly relevant to second-language learners who acquire the language of the country in which they reside. Assessment methods in language education which reflect the use of the language used in everyday activities will further enhance appropriate communication. Further research into language used on the internet will help to define common use and 'standards', which will allow language teachers to implement these. A better understanding of the use of language on the internet will also support other researchers in understanding the use of the informal-register when employed in various web tools. In a time where use of online platforms is part of an individual's daily activity, it is of crucial importance to understand the way in which people communicate within groups, and with the rest of society.

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APPENDICES

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Appendix I Common European language reference levels (Council of Europe, 2011)

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Figure 57: Common European language reference levels (Council of Europe, 2011)

Appendix II Types of social networking sites

One of the first popular social networking sites was Myspace. Myspace appeared in 2003 followed by Facebook in 2004 (Kujath, 2011). Kujath (2011) describes how Myspace users typically visit their page once a day whilst Facebook users visit theirs six times per day. The author found in studying a small group of college students that the users who used Facebook had more online ‘friend’ connections than those using Myspace, although Myspace users used the site for longer than the Facebook users. Both types of users used the site mainly to keep in touch with people they already knew. Although this study was performed in small groups and not in a second language setting, these findings could well impact the choice of social networking when applied in second language

education depending on the purpose of the activity. If the purpose of the tasks is to develop social interactions a site such as Facebook might be more appropriate, whilst Myspace might be more suitable to develop writing skills as explained in the next paragraph.

One of the important differences of Myspace to other social networking sites is that it can also be used as a blog site. Fulwood (2009) describes a study in which blogs on Myspace are analysed versus blogs on other sites. The author suggests based upon the research suggest that Myspace blogs are not dissimilar from other forms of blogging because they provide an important outlet for emotion and self-expression (Fullwood, Sheehan and Nicholls, 2009). This would support Kujath's (2011) findings that Myspace users spend more time on the site as blogging takes more time than simply posting a status update, which users of Facebook might typically use that site for.

Although the most popular social networking site, Facebook is not welcomed by all in the classroom. Lafford (2009) states that although Facebook is increasingly popular in the student world, it might not be the right tool to implement in the classroom. Lafford cites privacy as the main drawback regarding the use of Facebook and therefore considers other social networking sites as a better option that have more stringent privacy controls than Facebook. She states that students might not welcome colleges intruding in their students' private life, nor to allow classmates and teachers to get access to their Facebook personal pages. Although this is a valid observation, this could easily be resolved by asking the students to create a 'student' identity on Facebook rather than widening their private account for this purpose.

Facebook applies many of the elements of computer-mediated communication tools; such as synchronous and asynchronous discussion and sharing pictures and video capabilities (Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin, 2010).

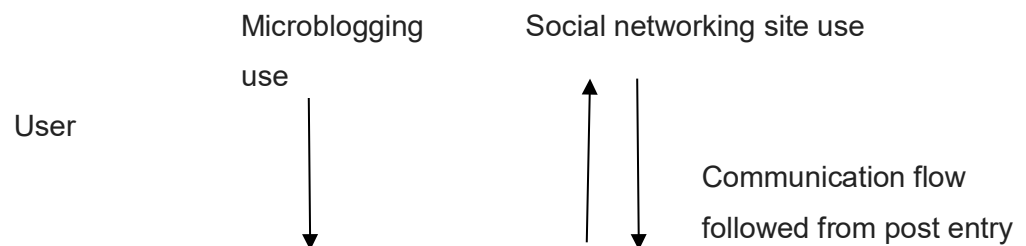
In contrast to social networking design for leisure such as Facebook, Klopfer et al. (2009, p11) describe how Think.com is a learning platform designed for education. It is filled with project ideas and enables students and teachers to work together, but the feel of the software is like a virtual learning environment. It is account based, which could be a barrier for many education environments. Limited studies have been completed on the use of social networking sites specifically created for education. This possibly could be area of interest for

future research projects to identify the differences between commercial and educational applications and the benefits of each.

Another type of social network that appeared relatively recently, in March 2006, is Twitter. Newgarden (2009) describes how Twitter can be used in both foreign and second language learning. She describes various ways in which students can ‘tweet’ outside the language class, generally prompted by their teacher. She considers the most ideal learning opportunity when students are asked to respond to native speakers on Twitter. In the article, she describes how students reply to a post by a native Italian that is planning to stay in the area close to their school. In the article, it is described as a ‘microblogging software platform’. Users sign in to the website and can then send and receive short messages called ‘Tweets’. These messages are limited to 140 characters. Users can sign up to ‘follow’ other people tweeting. The main advantage of the site from Newgarden’s point of view is that Twitter enables students to connect to native language users.

The use and purpose of Twitter is different to other social networking sites and this is also its success. However, in the researcher’s opinion the site should be seen as a micro blogging site and used for that purpose in the classroom rather than an alternative tool in social networking as ‘microblogs’ are not the same as entries on a social networking site, these are much more an output only, rather than the entry followed by response pattern that social networking sites encourage.

These two principles are visually explained in the figure below:



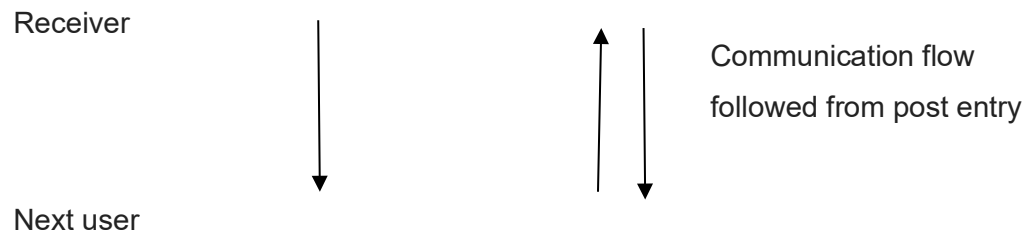


Figure 58 Interaction microblogging versus social networking sites

Ning is another site favoured by educators like Lafford (2009). She states that Ning might be a better solution for integrating social networking into the classroom due its increased privacy controls in comparison to Facebook (Lafford, 2009). 'Ning, which provides a platform for the creation of social networks, had become very popular with educators who created networks around curricular areas to trade information or bolster their skills and to interact in a closed environment with students.' (Davis, 2010b). The main advantage for educators in using the Ning site is that it is a closed environment unlike other social networking sites like Facebook.

Whilst the social networking sites described so far focus on the social aspect of the site, others try and combine various applications such as Elgg. This is described as a personal learning space, which combines various other webtools as displayed in the figure below (Campbell, Ammann and Dieu, 2005). Campbell et al. don't feel that the use of Elgg is effective due to the fact that it enables teachers to control and command the content, which they feel diminishes the return of peer-to-peer interaction. They feel that the teacher should be judged on their contributions rather than on the control that they have in content management. Although this indeed is a fair observation, the point of an integrated learning space is to offer flexibility to the learner as to what tools they use within the safe environment of the software. The fact that Elgg integrates various types of web tools and enables the teacher to control them as well as the learner, could be very interesting for use in the classroom.

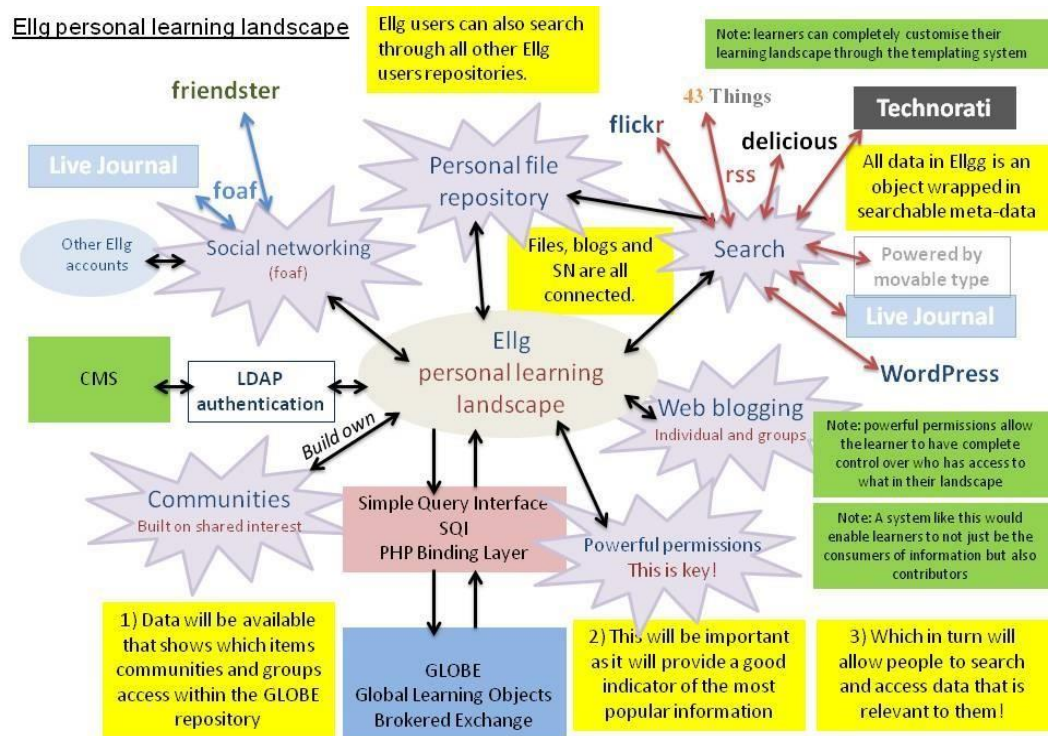


Figure 59: Elgg as a personal learning landscape adapted from the Elgg development team

Beldarrain (2006) describes another open source tool – the imeem social networking software, which is designed as invitation-only and claims to be completely secure. This means that teachers could set up a network and invite students in. No reports have been completed to date in regards to its success.

Appendix III Consent letters



All students
White Rose Language School

16th of December 2012

Dear student,

Why did I get this letter?

I would like to invite you to join a small research project that I am carrying out as part of my doctoral studies (Ph.D.) at Oxford Brookes University in England. The project has been approved by Ruby Vuurdien on behalf of White Rose Language School and by the University Research Ethics Committee at Oxford Brookes University. I am trying to find out what happens if I teach you to use informal language in addition to your English class. In order to do this we will be using a social networking site called Ning.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study is investigating what happens when you use Informal English on a social networking site. We are interested to see whether it has an effect on your communication as assessed by people that speak English as their first language.

How long will the project last?

The project will include five sessions (of an hour each) which you will complete in your own time using the Ning social networking site. This will allow you to practise the use of informal language in the form of entries and blogs. There will also be two short tests. However, the tests are only for the purposes of my project and will not make any difference to your work or grades at college.

What are the expected benefits or risks to the study?

Although this project has never before taken place, it could be that you benefit from it as it might help you in speaking more informal language and make you aware of the risks of the internet. A risk to the study is that as the study uses a social networking site called Ning, it could be misused by yourself or a fellow student in the form of cyberbullying. The site is monitored daily to stop this from happening. If you experience cyberbullying, it should be reported to your tutor and any students involved in this will be removed from the project.

How do I find out what the outcome was of the study?

Once the study is finished, I will publish a report which you can access if you want to. You can email me at 11111760@brookes.ac.uk so that I can contact you when it becomes available. The outcome of the study will be presented to your school and the intention is that it will be published in an academic journal.

Do I need to take part?

Your school will be trialing an innovative approach in English language instruction using a secure social networking site called Ning. Taking part in the lessons on Ning is optional and you are able to decide whether you want your work to be included in the research. You will be given your own user account and you must use a fictitious identity to enable you to take part. Your work will be taken out of the study if you decide not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you can change your mind and leave the study at any time. Whether you take part or not, it will not make any difference to your work or grades at school or college.

Can I be identified?



FACULTY HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL
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From the date of birth on your consent form, I will be able to identify you in order to add your data to the study if you would like to participate. Your teacher does not know whether you decided to participate or not. You will not be identified on the website or in the study.

What will happen with my information?

All data will be stored in a shared resource, which includes your posts on the social networking site. This information will be kept securely and will be available to teachers, the Ning administrators and the Oxford Brookes University research team. Other data, such as the outcome of the assessments, will also be stored on Ning, but your teachers do not have access to this data. Reported conversations between yourself and your teachers in regards to Ning will also be stored on my computer. The data will be stored for ten years because I have to store it for that time to comply with the requirements of Oxford Brookes University. The Ning data will be taken out of the UK and it will also be accessible by site administrators in California where Ning is based. Your posts are stored on the Ning website which is only accessible through secure log in, whilst the data used for analysis will not have any information that can identify you. This information is stored on my PC which is protected by a password.

How can I find out more?

If you have any questions about this letter or my project, you can contact me at any point on the email address shown at the top of this letter, or contact my supervisors Dr Androula Yiakoumetti or Dr Annie Haight. Their contact details can be found at the bottom of this letter. If you are concerned about how this study is carried out you can email the Ethics Committee at Oxford Brookes University at ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

How do I confirm whether I would like to participate or not?

If you would like more information, please let me know. Whether you wish to participate or not, please complete the attached consent form. If you wish, you can email these directly to me – this way your teacher or peers will not know what decision you have made. Alternatively, please put them in a sealed envelope and give this to Ruby Vuurdien in class.

How do I withdraw from the project if I change my mind?

You can withdraw from the study at any time if you change your mind. All you need to do is to email me at 11111760@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Kind regards,



Lisette Toetenel

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STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Research project:

'The use of the informal register in social networking sites within the second language classroom'

Lisette Toetenel

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Please initial box

- 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the chance to ask questions.
- 2. I understand that if I decide to take part in the above project, I can leave at any time, without giving reason.
- 3. I agree to take part in the above study.

Please tick box

- | | Yes | No |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4. I am content for material that I produce as part of the project to be used, in an anonymised form, for quotes in publications. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

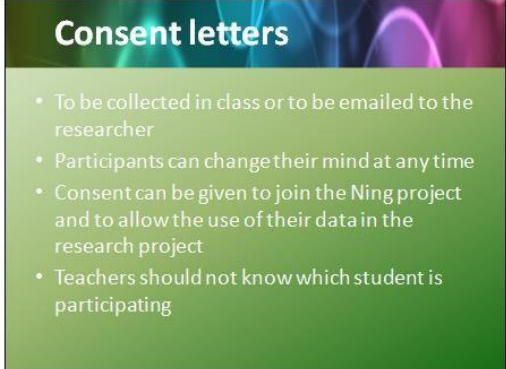
Name of Student	Date	Signature
Date of birth of Student		
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix IV Training material for intervention study



The screenshot shows the top of a Ning social networking site. The header features the word "englishning" in a stylized font. Below it is a navigation menu with links for HOME, ACTIVITIES, BLOGS, MY PAGE, PHOTOS, MEMBERS, MY NETWORK, and INVITE. The main content area has a green background and contains the following text:

Ning
'The use of the informal register on a Social networking site'



Consent letters

- To be collected in class or to be emailed to the researcher
- Participants can change their mind at any time
- Consent can be given to join the Ning project and to allow the use of their data in the research project
- Teachers should not know which student is participating



Ethical considerations

- Informed consent
- Benefits and risks of the study made clear
- Anonymous user identification
- Bullying prevention measures



Monitoring

- The researcher will monitor at least daily.
- All posts will be monitored.
- Inappropriate posts will be removed and participants will receive a warning.
- Notes will be made of any observations made by the researcher.

Use of Ning

- Instructions on how to use Ning are included in Task 2 Familiarisation.
- If participants have any problems in using Ning they can contact the researcher by email.

Possible issues

- Bullying – if this occurs the researcher will need to be notified immediately.
- Problems with the use of Ning – contact the researcher by email.

Data collected

- Posts on the social networking site
- Assessment results from first and final assessment
- Researcher's observations on Ning
- Communication between the researcher, teachers and participants on Ning
- Questionnaires from the participants of the pilot study

What is next?

- With your help, the study will be rolled out in the Netherlands in March 2013.
- The findings of the study are intended to be published in 2015/2016.
- At any stage, the researcher can be contacted for more information.

Appendix V Tasks for the intervention study

Setting up a Ning account

Step 1 Create a Ning profile

Click on this link to set up your profile:

<http://englishintervention.ning.com/?xgi=4FaKmGdIBhmi6H>

You will then see a screen similar to the one shown below. You can use your school email address or a personal one.

Sign Up for englishing Already a member? [Click here to sign in.](#)

Lisette invited you to join englishing

Email Address

Password

Retype Password

Birthdate
Month Day Year

could octopus

Type the two words:

reCAPTCHA™ stop spam, read books

[Sign Up](#)

About englishing
englishing is a social network

Step 2 Customise your Ning profile

Access your profile on

<http://englishintervention.ning.com/profiles/settings/editProfileInfo> and change your profile picture. We don't want you to use a photo of yourself. Instead, use a photo or picture of an animal. An easy way to find a picture is by using Google's image search at: www.google.co.uk/imghp?hl=en&tab=wi.



Kitten

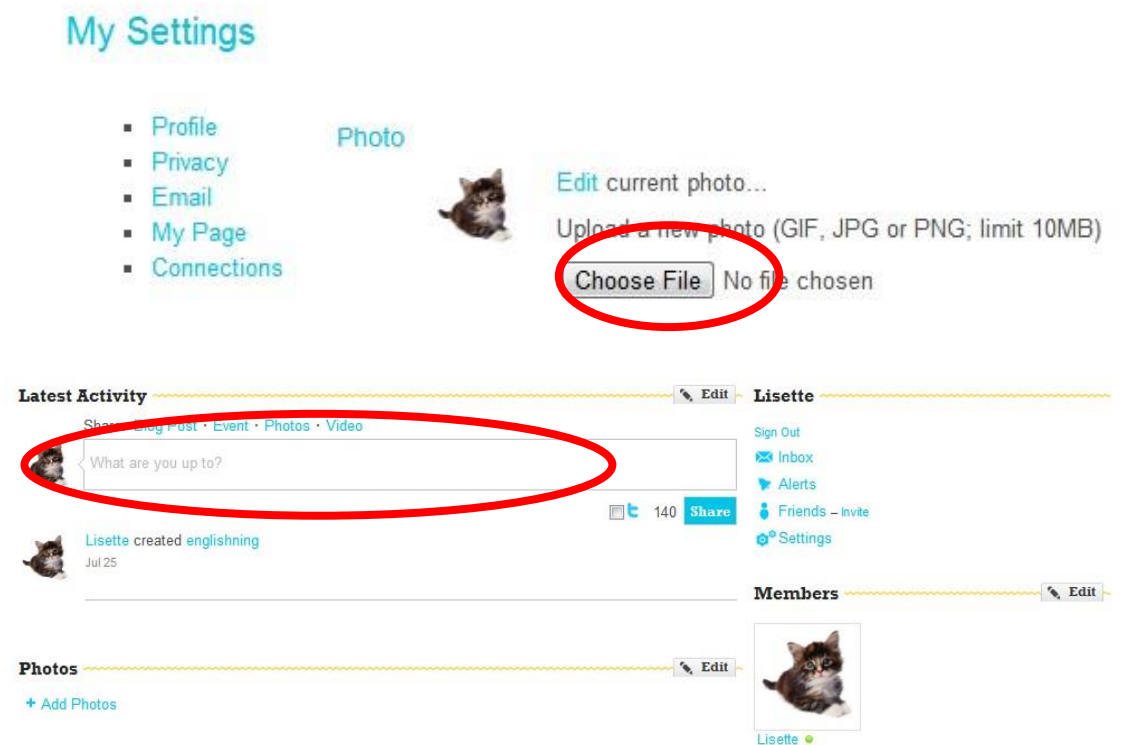
You can choose a picture of any animal you like. When you have found one, save it to your computer and upload it to your Ning profile. To do this, follow

On the settings page, click on the “Choose file” button next to the photo (see red circle below).

Find the picture that you saved onto your computer and select it.

Step 3 Take some time to think about your animal

Describe why you have chosen your animal and one or two cool facts about it. To do this, click on ‘Main’ and then add your text in the box that says ‘What are you up to?’.



Step 4 See what animals other students have chosen

Once you have posted something about your animal, have a look to see what animals your fellow students have chosen. To do this, click on the ‘Members’ button.

Then add some comments about your fellow students' animals (click on "Add a Comment", circled green above). Perhaps you have some more cool facts that you can add to the ones they have posted? Or maybe you just think their animal is super cute!

Step 5 Feedback for the researcher

You have now completed this task; well done! Please take some time to leave some feedback for me. If you click on 'Blogs', you can see the feedback blog.

All Blog Posts (1)



Feedback

Every week I will ask you to leave some feedback for me. I would like you to think about the tasks that you completed this week. Did you enjoy them? Were they useful in learning English? Were they too easy or too difficult or just right? What would you like to do more off?

Added by [Lisette](#) on August 12, 2012 at 8:26 — No Comments

★ Feature

End of familiarisation task.

Session 1 – Initial assessment

Part 1 Assessing your own English

How good is your English? Do you know what level you are working towards?

Assess your own level by answering the questions on the website below. This will give you an indication of the level that you are working towards based upon the Common European Framework of References for Languages.

<http://edl.ecml.at/LanguageFun/Selfevaluateyourlanguageskills/tabid/2194/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

Type the level that you are working towards here:

The levels indicated are the international language levels that are commonly used in the European Union.

Part 2 Reading

Many people visit the British Museum in London.

Open the website for the British Museum on <http://www.britishmuseum.org>.

1. What time does the Museum open on a Monday?
2. What is the closest tube station to the Museum?
3. How much does it cost to visit the Museum?

Click on the 'Galleries' tab – which Gallery would you be most interested in to visit?

Visit http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attractions-g186338-Activities-London_England.html - what number does the British Museum feature on their list?

Look up other ideas for things to do in London on the website. Write down the three that interest you the most.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Your friend has decided that he/she would like to see one of the musicals in the West End. He/she would like you to choose the show. Write an email to your friend and include the name and brief story line (in your own words) of the show that you would like to see.

Type your email here:

Your friend asks you to buy some tickets. He/she writes:

‘Just pop round with them @ about 1pm.’

Where do you think this type of language is most commonly used?

- a) In a letter
- b) In an email to a senior company manager
- c) On a social networking site

Type your answer here:

You have bought the tickets and been to see the show. Your friend did not like the show and feels bad about it. You explain that you bought the tickets cheap at the Leicester Square ticket booth.

Your friend says:

‘Well, I must admit [...] I feel a lot better now.’

What word could you insert in the space below?

Type your answer here:

Part 3 Listening

The next day, your friend would like to see the Tower of London.

Open the following website

<http://www.hrp.org.uk/TowerOfLondon/playourvisit/toptenthingstoseeanddo>.

Click on the link called "View our 'Meet the ravens' video". It's about half way down the page and looks like this:

Ravens



Legend says that the kingdom and the Tower will fall if the six ravens ever leave the Tower. The ravens have become one of the Tower's most famous sights.

[View our 'Meet the ravens' video >](#)

How many ravens were there during the time of Charles II?

- a) Six
- b) Hundreds and hundreds
- c) Thousands

Where was the Royal Observatory moved to?

- a) Greenwich
- b) Newcastle
- c) Observation Hill

Where do the ravens stay after sunset?

- a) In the Raven tree
- b) In their nests
- c) In their cages

How many ravens are there in the Tower today?

- a) Six

- b) Nine
- c) Hundreds and hundreds

How long do ravens live in the wild?

- a) Ten to fifteen years
- b) Up to forty years
- c) Forty to fifty years

How old was the oldest raven that lived at the Tower?

- a) Fifty years old
- b) Forty four years old
- c) Fifteen years old

Part 4 Writing

You liked your visit to London so much that you would like to consider spending the summer there before going back to school in September. Your school has agreed to pay part of it, as long as you take an English course.

When writing a letter to apply for an English course in London, which of the following sentences would you use:

I'd like to apply for the English course.

I would like to apply for the English course.

Type your answer here:

Part 5 Speaking

When you speak in English to a friend, is the language different to when you speak to your teacher? What is different about it?

Type your answer here:

The last time you were in London, you met a friend there. You have not been in touch for a while. You are going to meet again in London at the end of the month. You receive the following message from your friend:

“Hiya, when you are around, wanna play some ping pong? Check out Bounce: <http://www.timeout.com/london/museums-attractions/event/275232/bounce>. “
Respond to your friend and suggest two other attractions that you would like explore whilst in London.

Type here what you would post on the social networking site:

End of session 1.

Session 2 Formality of speech

Introduction

Look at the two images.



Cartoon a)



Cartoon b)

Exercise 1

Study the above cartoons and use the table below to explain the differences between them.

	Cartoon A	Cartoon B
Who might they be?		
Where might they be?		
What might they be talking about?		

Exercise 2

Complete the conversations in the two cartoons. There is no right or wrong answer for this task and it is quite likely that you will complete it differently to your peers, which gives us something to discuss on Ning. To help you to think of something to write, imagine that in Cartoon A, the person at the bar is a regular customer, more like a friend, who has been coming to the coffee shop every day for over five years. In Cartoon B, the people in the coffee shop are two colleagues discussing work.

Try to use language that you think is suitable for the situations they are in. See Box 1 for a clue!

Box 1 Formal and informal English

There is always more than one way to say or write something. There may be different words to choose from, or alternative ways of making a sentence. Sometimes, *how* you say something is just as important as *what* you say! These tasks are all about formal and informal ways to speak and write in English.

Formal English is often used when writing, particularly when the writer does not know the person they are writing to. Formal spoken English may be used in the workplace, such as when an employee talks to a customer or a manager.

Informal English tends to be used when friends talk to each other. However, informal *written* English is often used in emails, mobile phone text messages and social network sites.

Exercise 3

Below are the same two cartoons from Exercises 1 and 2. This is just one example as to how they could be completed. How do the conversations that you completed compare to the ones below?

The language used in Cartoon A is different to Cartoon B. Can you identify three differences? Post your answers on Ning.



Cartoon a)



Cartoon b)

Box 2 Informal = incorrect?

Many people think that formal language is the correct way of saying or writing something. However, would you say this to a close friend: 'Excuse me, please could you direct me to the kitchen?' They might think that you were a bit strange if you did. In English, it would be more common to say, "Whereabouts is the kitchen?"

The use of formal or informal language depends on who you are talking or writing to and what it is you want to say. A formal way of saying or writing something is not necessarily the correct way. And as the above example shows, the informal can be more appropriate.

Exercise 4

Read Box 2. Can you think of any other situations or people with whom you should use informal language?

Can you think of any other situations or people with whom you should use formal language?

Post your answers on Ning.

Exercise 5

Test your knowledge of informal and formal language by completing the quiz on the BBC website. Click on the green 'Done' button. Then click on the green 'Play' button. Make sure that you click on yellow 'play hard' button when you start the game. Follow the instructions once you are in the game.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/game/en37spea-game-say-what>

Exercise 6

Look again at the previous tasks. Based upon the tasks above, can you specify what features in the language used make it informal? Can you give examples and try to name the feature?

Examples	Features of the informal language
Such a cow!	Emotionally charged language

Exercise 7

These are some of the features that belong to informal and formal language.

Complete the right-hand column below with 'formal' or 'informal'.

Features of language	Examples	Formal or informal?
Use of polite language	Please, excuse me	
Use of contractions	I'm, You'll	

Box 3

In formal language it is more common to use polite language such as please and excuse me, whilst in informal language more emotional language is used.

Formal language	Informal language
Use of polite language	Use of contractions
Use of old-fashioned language	Use of amplifiers and emotionally charged language
	Use of vague language

There is not one type of formal or informal language. Often there is a gradient, from more formal to more informal.

Use of amplifiers and emotionally charged language	Wow! That is a wonderful bag!	
Use of vague language	Yeah – that’s sort of what I mean.	
Use of old-fashioned language	Please ensure that you have your personal affects with you at all times.	

Exercise 8 (Difficult task – don’t worry if you find it too hard)

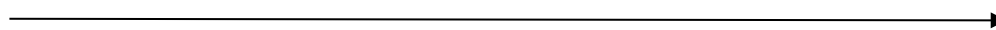
In this exercise, you will listen to audio clips taken from radio interviews with three British celebrities. Each clip is five minutes long. Hold ‘ctrl’ and ‘click’ on the interviewee’s name to download each clip. Whilst listening to the clip, count the amount of times that you hear the features in the table below. On the basis of your tally, can you rank the clips in order, from most formal to informal? Feel free to discuss this on Ning.

Informal language	Denise Lewis	Mona Siddiqui	Morrissey
Use of contractions			

Use of amplifiers and emotionally charged language			
Use of vague language			

Formal

Informal



Exercise 9

Sometimes it is not easy to decide what type of language to use, especially when using email. What would you use for the following? If you don't know what the communication methods below are, look them up on the internet.

Work email

Instant messaging

Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Hyves)

Business networking sites (e.g. Linked-in)

Text message

Post your answers on Ning.

Exercise 10

The following sentences are either formal or informal. Write "i" for informal or "f" for formal in the boxes to show which you think they are.

The weather will be mild today. []

How's John? []

I fancy heading down to London tomorrow if the weather's nice. []

It has come to my attention that your grades have dropped. []

YouTube is a good learning tool. []

YouTube is wicked! []

You're doing great, nice work! []

Thank you for doing an excellent job. []

Exercise 11

Now write three of your own sentences. Then post them on Ning (as three separate posts). When you have posted your sentences, take a look at the ones posted by the other students and comment on the level of formality.

1.

2.

3.

End of Session 2

Session 3 – Contractions

Box 1 Contractions

Contractions are used to make words shorter and are often used in speaking. They are created by putting two words together and removing a vowel and replacing this with an apostrophe.

Are not – aren't

They can also be used in writing – especially when writing in an informal way.

Some people think that it is better not to use contractions. This is not true.

Although people will still understand you, it is strange when you use a long form in informal speech and it can be confusing for the person that you speak with.

Task 1 Complete the Gap Fill

Complete this activity in the Word document. Start a new blog post called

'Session 3 Contractions and your user name' and attach the document to it. Use the following contractions to complete the letter:

didn't

we'll

you've

it's

Dear Jo,

Just a quick line to thank you for a fab time! It was great to see you again and the kids really enjoyed going around London - hope we (1)_____ tire you out too much!

It would be great to catch up at some point soon. Maybe you could come to us - (2)_____ been ages since (3)_____ been. And.. Brighton is lovely in the summer! (4)_____ be planning a birthday party in July and it would be great if you could make it.

Anyway, let me know nearer the time if you can make it.

Take care, hope to see you soon.

Love, Debbie xxx

Task 2 Do you know your contractions?

This task uses an online quiz to help you to check your knowledge of the use of contractions in English. You can access the quiz [here](#). Once you have completed the quiz, update the box below with your score.

0%

Task 3 Blogging – informal or formal?

Complete this activity in the Word document that you saved as per Task 1.

What type of language would you use in a blog? Would you use an informal style or a formal style? Would you use contractions?

Russell Brand is a famous TV presenter in the United Kingdom. He was also a personal friend of Amy Winehouse, who died at age 27. He talks about her life and death in his blog.

Read the first paragraph of the blog on www.russellbrand.tv/2011/07/for-amy/.

What is the first paragraph about?

What addiction do you think that Russell is referring to?

What does he mean by “she’s gone”?

Task 3 continues overleaf...

Find three contractions in the first paragraph and write down their meanings in the table below.

Contraction	Meaning

Russell could have used a contraction in this sentence: 'There will be a phone call'. What contraction could he have used?

Can you think of any reason why he has not used a contraction here?

In paragraph two, Russell says that no one can intervene. Do you think that is true? Do you think we should not intervene when people are using drugs? Write a short paragraph about this and post it as a response to this task [here](#). Try to use contractions in your sentences.

Task 4 Feedback from your posts

Last week you were asked to post some informal and formal sentences. Below is an example of a sentence posted by your peers.

“I beg your pardon, I would feel very dignified if you share this pretty evening. Thanks.”

Some of your feedback on the sentence included:

“It's formal but even it can be more with Thank you instead of Thanks.”

“it's a mix between formal and informal. i think it's formal because he doesn't use contractions and uses the word dignify. But in a formal context I'm not sure if I'd use thanks. For me, it's informal.”

“Thank you” is indeed more formal than “thanks”, although the latter can also be used in business communication. Terms such as “cheerio”, “cheers”, “toodle-pip”, “later on, bro” and “ta-ra” would be used in a more informal setting and never in a formal business setting.

What other words that are used in the a above sentence might contribute to its informal ‘feel’?

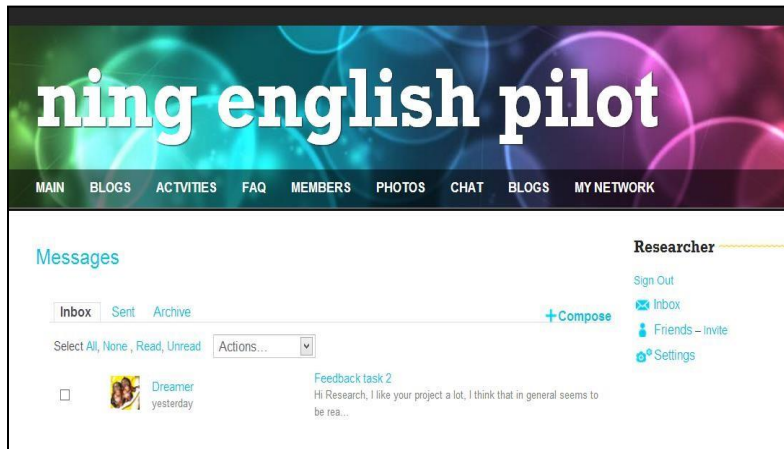
Post your response [here](#).

Task 5 Rewriting from formal to informal

The following e-mail is to your boss. However, as you have worked with your boss for a number of years now it is far too formal. Rewrite the same e-mail but use a more informal t Decide which information can be omitted. Your boss is called Sarah Wellington.

Adapted from British Council (2012) Business Writing Skills. Available at www.learnenglish.org.uk/profsLessons/module%202/business%20writing%20skills%20lesson%202.html. Accessed on 31/01/13.

Once you have written your email, send it to two of your peers. You will need to invite them to be 'friends' first and they will need to accept you before you can do this.



When in Ning, click first on ' friends invite' to invite your peers. Then click on 'inbox' and then on 'compose' to access your Ning mailbox.

Review the email of your peer (have they used suitable terminology and contractions?) and then respond to them with your feedback.



End of session 3.

Session 4 – Amplifiers and emphatics

Read the box below, then complete Exercise 1.

Amplifiers and emphatics

Amplifiers give words more expression. Emphatics are those words that have a strong expression. They are most often used in informal language.

Exercise 1

Match these adjectives with an emphatic adjective in the box:

surprising	_____	funny	_____
small	_____	ugly	_____
good	_____	cold	_____
dirty	_____	big	_____
pretty	_____	old	_____
clean	_____	hungry	_____
tired	_____	angry	_____
hot	_____		

Emphatic adjectives				
exhausted	filthy	hideous	tiny	starving
spotless	hilarious	astounding	boiling	fantastic
fantastic	freezing	ancient	gorgeous	furious

Exercise 2

Listen to the following example of 'the English we speak' by following the link www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/theenglishwespeak/2011/03/110308_tews_9_awesome_page.shtml.

'Awesome' is an example of an emphatic. Can you give two more examples of emphatics from the BBC clip?

- 1.
- 2.

Exercise 3

Change the following sentences by replacing the adjective with an emphatic.

1. This is a good wine.
2. That shed is suitable.
3. That portfolio is in order.

Exercise 4

Comics are a literary tradition and often use forms to evoke emotional responses. Below is an extract from a famous British comic called The Beano. Can you identify three features of emphatic language from it?

IMAGE REMOVED FROM ELECTRONIC
VERSION - COPYRIGHT RESTRICTION

2.

3.

Post your answers on the social networking site [here](#) and compare them with others.

Exercise 5

Change the following sentences by replacing the emphatic by an adjective.

Paris is sensational!

Hussain Bolt is incredible!

Chinese food is delicious!

Exercise 6

The British Council provides a nice website that enables you to make your own comic in really easy steps. Follow the link below to make one now...

<http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/make-your-own/comic-strip-maker>

Write a comic about the best day of your life, or a topic that you feel very strongly about. Make sure that you use lots of emphatic language!

End of session 4.

Session 5 – Final assessment

Part 1 Assessing your English language skills

In the first assessment task you completed the self assessment provided by the European Commission. As it is a self-assessment, the results can be skewed by your own perception of your language skills and thus the results can be higher or lower than the tests you have undertaken previously. The problem with tests is that they often not reliable, as often they only test part of the language skills. Keeping the above in mind (and the validity of this test), complete the test below and report back your results.

www.englishtag.com/tests/level_test.asp

Type your result in here:

The scores are representative to the levels below:

A1 Breakthrough or beginner

A2 Waystage or elementary

B1 Threshold or intermediate

B2 Vantage or upper intermediate

C1 Effective Operational Proficiency or advanced

C2 Mastery or proficiency

Part 2 Reading

Many people visit the Big Ben in London.

Open the website for the Big Ben as part of the Houses of Parliament on <http://www.parliament.uk/bigben>.

1. Who made the Big Ben?
2. How many bells does Big Ben have?
3. What is the name of the Tower in which Big Ben hangs?
4. How often has Big Ben stopped ticking?

Visit http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attractions-g186338-Activities-London_England.html - what number does the Big Ben feature on their list?

Look up other ideas for things to do in London on the website. Write down the three that interest you the least.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Extension task (complete this if you like, but this is not required)

Once you have completed the reading activity, clean Big Ben on the website <http://data.parliament.uk/assets/education/raceagainstchime/raceagainstchime.htm>.

Writing task

Your friend has decided that he/she would like to do some shopping whilst in London. He/She would like you to choose where to visit. Write an email to your friend and include the name and brief explanation (in your own words) of the shops/area that you would like to visit.

Type your email here:

Part 3 Listening

The next day, your friend would like to see China Town. You decide to have a look on the web first. Open the link here

<http://www.chinatownlondon.org/page/chinatown-videos/79/316>.

Click on the second video or open it here

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=PoRqIWzNmQ.

What is the best to eat in China Town?

- a) Noodles
- b) Egg Foo Yong
- c) Dim Sum

What is the new craze in China Town?

- a) Green tea
- b) Lichi juice
- c) Juice tea

What is Aldo afraid for whne making his dim sum?

- a) That it is not going to look pretty
- b) That it is going to explode
- c) That it won't taste good

Click on the third video or open it here

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=E1yMdaA_NhU

What is Vincent's role?

- a) Owner
- b) Mixologist
- c) General Manager

Why does Vincent change the juice every hour?

- a) To avoid oxydation of the juice
- b) To avoid spoilage

c) To ensure that it has the best taste

What music does the bar play on Tuesdays?

a) Jazz music

b) Chill out music

c) Chinese opera

Part 4 Writing

You were planning to visit England after your exams. Unfortunately the exam did not go well and you will need to resit it. You need to email your friend to let him know. Which of the below sentences would you use?

I'm sorry, but I can't come to England in July as I've got a resit.

I am sorry, but I cannot come to England in July as I have to take my resit.

Type your answer here:

Where do you think that this type of language is used:

Peeps some say hi tomorrow and learn about the project!

a) In a letter

b) In an email

c) On a social networking site

Type your answer here:

What word could you insert in the space below?

These are the clothes [...] I sent for Hassan.

Type your answer here:

Part 5 Speaking

When you speak in English to a stranger, is the language different to when you speak to your friend? What is different about it? Is that the same in your own language?

Type your answer here:

You had no reply from your friend. You know that he often uses a social networking site. You decide to post something on his profile about your trip.

Type here what you would post on the social networking site:

End of Session 5

Appendix VI Learner questionnaire for intervention study

1. How much time per week did you spend using Ning?

Week	Time spent
Week 1	
Week 2	
Week 3	
Week 4	
Week 5	

2. How easy was it to use Ning?

3. What could have made Ning easier to use?

4. Which task did you enjoy most?

5. Which task did you enjoy least?

6. How appropriate was the language level for you?

7. Which of the tasks did you find useful and why?

8. Has the project improved your awareness of the importance of the informal language?

9. Any other comments that you would like to provide:

Appendix VII Posting data

The posts provided by the students are included here with exception of the posts that uploaded the Ms Word documents to the social networking site.

Mar 1



[Prue commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 5](#)

"Yes, I think what I liked the most were Youtube videos. They were short and entertaining. I hope we have been able to help you in your research. Good luck! :)"



[Vitto commented](#) on [Zelda's](#) blog post [Task 3 Zelda](#)

"Thank you for the advice! I completely agree!!"

Feb 28



[Zelda commented](#) on [Zelda's](#) blog post [Task 3 Zelda](#)

"Hi, Vitto! I would change only two words from your e-mail: instead of "dear Sarah", I'd write just "Hi, Sarah" or even "Hiya" because "dear" is still formal. And I'd replace "could" for..."

Feb 26



[Vitto commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 5](#)

"Hello! I've liked this last task as a summarising of everything. I found it easy, but you had to think quite a bit in the first exercise, and the videos about China Town were interesting (specially the one where the chef makes the Dim Sum). As..."

Feb 26



[Vitto](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"I'm sorry about Task 4, but after trying many times, I haven't been able to do my comic!! I found it interesting, but I couldn't..."

Feb 26



[Vitto commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 4, Exercise 4](#)

"1. The use of capital letters is a way of emphasizing what they are saying. In the comic it's used several times, and in red colour to make the emphasis stronger, when there are noises, when it's said something very loud, or to



explain..." [Brontë](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi Researcher, This last session has also been stimulating for me. I really like the reading concerning the Big Ben, learning new things I didn't know at all. However, I must admit that the question about how often the Big Ben has stopped..."

268

Feb 26

Feb 26



[Vitto commented](#) on [Zelda's](#) blog post [Task 3 Zelda](#)

"Hi Zelda; As you've invited me as a friend, I've accepted and read your e-mail in task three. I think it's short but perfectly explained what it want to say. If you want to comment on mine, it'll be in my task 3. Thank you so..."

Feb 26



[Vitto commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 4](#)

"For me the use of the expression pretty is formal; instead it could be use nice. But I agree also with Mrs Who in the case of "I beg your pardon", which sounds really formal, like asking somebody important, or in a work relationship"



[Vitto commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 3](#)

"I think in many cases it's really difficult to intervene, because people addict to drugs are very unpredictable, and you can't control them all the time. Nonetheless, in my opinion we've to try to intervene and convince them to let..."

Feb 26

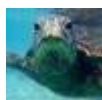
Feb 26



[Vitto commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 9](#)

" Work email - Formal Instant messaging - Informal Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Hyves)- Informal Business networking sites (e.g. Linked-in) -à Formal
Text message - Informal "

Feb 26



[Vitto](#) is now friends with [Little Prince](#) and [Zelda](#)



[eureka commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 5](#)

"Hi researcher! I think this task has been surely the easiest, more dynamic and diversified. It was a pleasure to help you in your research. Good luck!"

Feb 25

270

Feb 26

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Brontë](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi, I'll give you my feedback on Tuesday. I can't now. Anyway, very interesting, as usual. Cheers, Brontë."

Feb 24

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Researcher](#) left a [comment](#) for [Little Prince](#)

"I have recieved your email - thank you very much. Researcher"

Feb 22

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Prue commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 4, Exercise 4](#)

"I think they are Out! which is short to express the idea quickly. Brilliant! which express the person's feelings Never which emphasize the idea a little bit more."

Feb 22



[Little Prince commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 4, Exercise 4](#)

"As it's been said before, reading all the previous comments after doing this task myself has been incredibly useful to realize about some features used for emphasis. In my opinion, the next structures are used to emphasize in the comic:
1. Use..."

Feb 22

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Penguin commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 4, Exercise 4](#)

"1. Use of capital letters, red colour and exclamation marks 2. Use of empathic adjectives such as brilliant. 3. Use of onomatopoeias"

Feb 22



[Gabriel Syme commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 4, Exercise 4](#)

"1.The red color.2.Exclamation marks3.Use capital letters"

Feb 21



[Zelda commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 4, Exercise 4](#)

"The three previous comments have been really helpful, I didn't realize that the type of font is another way to emphasize what a character says. Similarly, I didn't consider interjections and onomatopoeic language as resources of emphatic..."

Feb 21



[Zelda commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 4, Exercise 4](#)

"I can only think of two features: 1. Using capital letters: "Chaaarge!" 2. Using exclamation marks."

Feb 21



[Mrs Who](#) commented on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 4, Exercise 4](#)

"1. Capital red letters are use to emphasise. Besides, most of them are with an exclamation mark. For example 'DISASTER!' is in capital letters and has an exclamation mark. This word is used for very bad accidents with a great damage or..."

Feb 20



[Researcher](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Excellent - thank you! "

Feb 19



[Brontë](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi, Thanks for your feedback on the informal letter. It is really useful. Now, I'll give you mine regarding Task 4 that I couldn't give it when I finished the activities. I found it easy, though I may make mistakes. However, the..."

Feb 19



[Researcher](#) left a [comment](#) for [Zelda](#)

"Thanks Zelda - as before - really helpful. I did not realise that it was tricky to find your way around... I'll make sure that I include the links. Researcher"

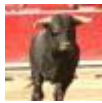
Feb 18



[Zelda](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"I hope it's not too late to send my feedback on Session 3... Tasks 1 and 2 were far too easy. Here in Spain, students learn how to contract the verbs To be and To have at school. Task 3 and 4 were... not difficult but at least more..."

Feb 18



[eureka](#) [commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 4, Exercise 4](#)

"The use of: 1. emphatic adjectives: "Brilliant", "rubbishy" 2. capital letters in diferent balloon forms and sizes 3. onomatopoeias: "RAZZZZZZZ""

Feb 17

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[canelo](#) [commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 4, Exercise 4](#)

"1. You're banned. 2. Get out of my restaurant! 3. ...and that's this rubbish place..."

Feb 17



[Brontë](#) [commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 4, Exercise 4](#)

"1.- Any change in the physical characteristics of the writing - using capital letters, different styles of writing or print - will have the effect of attracting the attention of a reader. OUT! / THIS rubbishy place. SCREAM! DISASTER! 2.- The..."

Feb 15

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Mrs Who](#) and [canelo](#) are now friends



Feb 15



[Mrs Who](#) [commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 4](#)

"'I beg your pardon' sounds very formal. You can also say 'I will feel' instead of 'I would feel' to make it less formal, or use a contraction: 'I'd feel'. As my mates, I agree with the misuse of the word..."

Feb 15



[Mrs Who commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 3](#)

"It's a difficult question. I think you should be there in case the person needs help, but you can't intervene directly in people's lives, what's more, you can't help if that person don't need be helped or if that..."

Feb 15

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Little Prince commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 3](#)

"I suppose it completely depends on every particular situation, being all of them different and very delicate. My first idea would be to say: yeah, we should intervene, trying to persuade all the people in this situation about going to a rehab..."

Feb 15



[Little Prince commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 4](#)

"I agree with the previous comments. I think that pretty and share give you a rather informal feeling, or at least I suspect that they are less formal than the expression "I beg your pardon". I also think that the word..."

Feb 15



[Prue commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 3](#)

"Mmmm I was thinking about the film 28 days by Sandra Bullock. She is forced to go to enter a drug and alcohol rehab center. She didn't want to be at first, but in the end she realises she wants to change. So maybe sometimes it's good to..."

Feb 15



[canelo commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 4](#)

"The less formal structure for me is 'share this pretty evening'. There should be surely more formal words."

Feb 15



[canelo commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 3](#)

"I agree with him. We can only encourage and help addicts, but the decision must be theirs. Only a person who is firmly decided to leave drugs will achieve it."

Feb 15



[canelo](#) and [eureka](#) are now friends



Feb 15



[Zelda](#) left a [comment](#) for [eureka](#)

"Hiya! Here you have my e-mail. What do you think? At least now it's much shorter! Hi, Sarah! Regarding the e-mail you sent me about the new photocopier, I have already told all colleagues to use recycle paper because it's more..."

Feb 14



[Zelda](#) [commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 4](#)

"I'm not sure at all but maybe I'd change "pretty" as it's a too common term and I'd rewrite "share" into the past simple "shared" so that it fully respects the rules to form conditional sentences..."

Feb 14

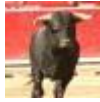


[Zelda](#) [commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 3](#)

"As far as I know, the point's not whether you can intervene or not. You can give it a try but if the person's really addicted, your efforts will be useless. The question should be then: is it worth intervening? The only case I've..."

Feb 13

[0 Comments](#) [0 Likes](#)



[eureka commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 4](#)

"As Prue said, perhaps the word "pretty" sounds a bit informal ("beautiful" or "charming" could be better?). Also I'd change the word "dignified" for "grateful", "pleased" or..."

Feb 13



[Gabriel Syme commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 4](#)

"Bronte is right. I thought that pretty was pretty formal."

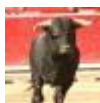
Feb 13



[Gabriel Syme commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 3](#)

"Intervencion in this cases is not attacking the freedom of the person, because taking drugs isn't freedom, is slavery. Still, we've (and we should've) the freedom of keep us in slavery. So I think that we don't have to..."

Feb 13



[eureka commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 3](#)

" It's really difficult to answer this question. For everybody is easy to say "No, we have to intervene", but when you're in this situation, it could be really difficult to intervene if this person doesn't want to give..."

Feb 13



[Brontë](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi, I have just posted Task 3 and I must tell you that there was no problem at all with Exercise 2. IT WAS ME, as I was clicking on the wrong button. I've been doing this all my life! One of my colleagues told me that the apostrophe button is..."

Feb 13



[Brontë](#) posted a blog post

[Task 3](#)

Session 3 – Contractions Task 1 Complete the Gap

Fill didn't we'll you've it's Complete

this activity in the Word document. Start a new blog post called 'Session 3 Contractions and your user name' and attach the document to it. Use the following contractions to complete the letter: 5th April 2013 Dear Jo, Just a quick line to thank you for a fab time! It was great to see you again and the kids really enjoyed going around... [See More](#)

Feb 13

[0 Comments](#) [0 Likes](#)



[Brontë](#) and [Prue](#) are now friends



281

Feb 13



[Brontë](#) left a [comment](#) for [Penguin](#)

"Hi Penguin, I wonder if you're interested in being my friend. Brontë"

Feb 11



[Brontë](#) left a [comment](#) for [Prue](#)

"Hi Pru, I wonder if you are interested in being my friend. Brontë"

Feb 11



[Mrs Who](#) posted a [status](#)

"Now I've just realised that it's 'Aren't you?' Thank you for your comment!"

Feb 11

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Researcher](#) left a [comment](#) for [Brontë](#)

"Hi I tried to chat to you to find out what went wrong with Exercise 2. It is strange as I tried the quiz from here and it works, but maybe there is a problem with the layout of your keyboard... I'll have to wait and see what the feedback is..."

282

Feb 10



[Brontë](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi, I have sent you Task 5 since I couldn't select any other friend. I suppose I have done something wrong. I really enjoyed Task 3, mainly the blog regarding Amy Winehouse. I also like the wide range of activities to do-there's..."

Feb 10

[0 Comments](#) [0 Likes](#)



[Brontë](#) [commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 4](#)

"I think "dignified" is a false friend which means calm and serious and deserving respect (Oxford English Dictionary) I don't know why but I think beautiful is more formal than pretty. Maybe Gabriel Syme meant something..."

Feb 10



[Brontë](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi, I've just seen you are in. I've had a problem with Task 2 Do you know your contractions? I was doing the quiz and when I wanted to write the mark (') of the apostrophe, I wasn't allowed. For example, we are, instead of..."

Feb 10



[Brontë](#) commented on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 3](#)

"Tough question. It's not easy at all. In fact if he says so, it's because he himself was difficult to talk into, and I'm sure not few times his real friends and relatives did their best to make him understand that he was on the..."

Feb 10



[Researcher](#) left a [comment](#) for [Prue](#)

"Ah - that is what a pilot study is for! Thank you for letting me know. I have adapted the instructions.. you'll need to invite two peers first and when they accept you can email them. You can just email me your work if you prefer to do so. "

Feb 10



[Prue](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"I can't send messages to my peers, they have to be friends of mine. I can only send them comments."

Feb 9



[Prue commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 4](#)

"Maybe the word pretty. I'd use great, something more neutral instead of pretty which I think it's more personal. Feel is another word which I'd use in informal more than formal. I think in formal you're more neutral and not..."

Feb 9



[Prue commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 3, Exercise 3](#)

"I think no, you always have to intervene. The problem is how and the problem is the person doesn't want to be helped. It has to be the person who sees the problem and do something, but it's impossible not intervene. Maybe you can't..."

Feb 9



[Researcher commented](#) on [Penguin's](#) blog post [Posting the second task](#)

"Good work Penguin. Just a quick comment.. Cartoon A: 1. How is your wife doing? Hope she finally found the job she was looking for... 2. Yes, she did mate.

Can't believe I forgot to tell you! Mate indicates that the conversation is very..."



[Researcher commented](#) on [Mrs Who's](#) blog post [No Title](#)

"Good work Mrs Who! Just a quick comment... you put: 'Not bad, but I'm fed up with the same news every single day! Don't you?' Because you use I'm fed up (to be), you will need to use the same verb in the question -..."

Feb 9
Feb 9



[Researcher commented](#) on [Prue's](#) blog post [Prue Task 2](#)

"Hi Prue - good work on the material from last week. In terms of your comment: You've made up yet Try to express your idea as quick as you can. Give them immediate. That is indeed true and as a consequence the grammatical rules are broken,..."

Feb 9



[Researcher commented](#) on [Little Prince's](#) blog post [Task 2](#)

"Hi Little Prince - thank you for the feedback. I have made the next task a little shorter. You did well in this task - keep up the good work. "



[Researcher commented](#) on [Zelda's](#) blog post [Task 2](#)

"Hi Zelda - what's/ She's/ Can't/ what's Use of abbreviations. These are often called contractions, rather than abbreviations (although they do abbreviate the word - I guess). "

Feb 9



[Researcher commented](#) on [Brontë's](#) blog post [Task 2 Exercise 9](#)

Feb 9

"This is an excellent overview and I agree with you that in work emails (once you have met the person that you are emailing) you can use contracted verb forms. Often this also depends on the type of organisation that you are working for. "

Feb 9



[Researcher commented](#) on [Mulan's](#) blog post [Task 2, exercise 3](#)

"Interesting that you looked at the cartoons (watch spelling cartoon) and attributed the opposite level of closeness to them. You are absolutely right - the closer the relationship, the more appropriate it is to use informal language."

Feb 8

Feb 8

[1 Comment 0 Likes](#)



[Little Prince commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

"3. Mr. Smith, I strongly suspect that this essay could be improved in terms of the use of an appropriate language. Could you check it and go back with an better version next week, please?"

Feb 8



[Little Prince commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

"2. Are you kidding me, guy?"

Feb 8



[Little Prince commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

"1. Jesus Christ! What a mess? What's going on here?"



[Little Prince commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 3](#)

" My conversations A - What an awful day, isn't it? It's raining dogs and cats!
- My God! Yes! I hate this dull and eternal winter! B - I wonder what the boss
wants to speak about so urgently - I..."

Feb 8



[Mrs Who commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

"I'll comment on Zelda's phrases: 1. I was wondering if you could tell me what
you think about this issue? It's quite formal. Zelda uses an indirect question
instead of direct questions (very polite) 2. Yep, I'm gonna do that..."

Feb 8



[Mrs Who commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

"3. Fancy a..."

Feb 8



[Mrs Who commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

"2. Don't do that! It's a waste of time!"

Feb 8

Feb 8



[Mrs Who commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

"1. I think I will be a competent employee because I consider myself a skilled waitress."

Feb 8



[Mrs Who commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 9](#)

" Work email: formal Instant messaging: informal Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Hyves): informal Business networking sites (e.g. Linked-in): formal Text message: informal "

Feb 8



[Prue commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Feedback](#)

"I like the activities, but they are too many for me. It takes me more time than I thought."

[1 Comment 0 Likes](#)



[Zelda](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi, I've just finished posting all the activities. In my opinion, the BBC Quiz was not so difficult because the type of language needed for all situations was more or less the expected one, and it was a good clue in order to guess the correct..."

Feb 8



[Zelda commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

"As Gabriel Syme's and Dreamer's sentences have been commented, I'll give my opinion about Prue's ones: 1. What a cool idea! --> It's a colloquial way of expressing so I'd say it's rather informal. 2. OMG!..."

Feb 8

[1 Comment 0 Likes](#)



[Zelda commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

"1. I was wondering if you could tell me what you think about this issue? 2. Yep, I'm gonna do that right now. 3. You bet!"

Feb 8



[Zelda commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 9](#)

"Work email : I would use formal or informal language depending on the person I'm writing to. If it's a close colleague, I'd use an informal style. Instant messaging: informal language. Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook,..."

Feb 8



[Zelda commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 4](#)

"Read Box 2. Can you think of any other situations or people with whom you should use informal language? Apart from friends, probably any close person you feel confident with. Can you think of any other situations or people with whom you..."

Feb 8



[Zelda commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 3](#)

"a) How do the conversations that you completed compare to the ones below? In a) the vocabulary used is far more informal, uses phrasal verbs and idioms. In
b) the difference is not so big, I think: both respect grammar..."



[Mrs Who commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 4](#)

"I'd use informal language with close relatives or relatives of the same age as me, in a coffee break (with my workmates or classmates), or when I'm in a party. And I'd use formal language with my boss, my teacher, with old people,..."

Feb 8



[Mrs Who commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 3](#)

"Cartoon A: A: Hey John, how are things? B: Not bad, but I'm fed up with the same news every single day! Don't you? Cartoon B: A: Good morning Mrs Smith... Sorry, I can't speak now... I'm in a meeting with Mr..."

Feb 8



[Prue commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

"I think about dreamer sentences 3. Details of the research methodology are to be found in the next Section." it's formal because she uses the world methodology "2. Don't gimme that rubbish." It's informal because she..."

Feb 7



[Prue commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

Feb 8

"I think Gabriel's sentences are the first one it's a mix between formal and informal. i think it's formal because he doesn't use contractions and uses the world dignify. But in a formal context I'm not sure if I'd use..."

Feb 7



[Prue commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

" 1. What a cool idea! 2. OMG! R u serious? 3. If you look the file, we will discuss the following figures."

Feb 7



[Prue commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 9](#)

" Work email Formal Instant messaging Informal Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Hyves) Informal Business networking sites (e.g. Linked-in) Formal Text message Informal "

Feb 7



[Prue commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 4](#)

"1. I'd use formal language if I had to talk with my boss or a client. 2.- I'd use informal language if I was talking with family or classmates."

Feb 7



[Prue commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 3](#)

"Cartoon A A: My wife is having a surgery next month and I'm worried about it. B: Don't worry. They say it's something simple. Anyway, I'll go to visit her as soon as I can. Don't worry, everything is going to be..."

Feb 7



[Dreamer commented](#) on [Penguin's](#) blog post [Task2, exercise 11](#)

"1 and 3 are informal whereas 2 is formal."

Feb 7



[Dreamer](#) posted a [status](#)

"3. Details of the research methodology are to be found in the next Section."

Feb 7

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Dreamer](#) posted a [status](#)

"2. Don't gimme that rubbish."

Feb 7

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Dreamer](#) posted a [status](#)

"1. In a kinda madness I've bought tickets for next Tiesto concert. D'you wanna come with me?"

Feb 7

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Dreamer commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

"Sentences of Gabriel Syme:1. It's formal but even it can be more with Thank you instead of Thanks. 2. Very very very informal. 3. In the middle, informal because of the contractions but formal in the meaning. My three sentences are posted in my..."

Feb 7



[Dreamer commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 9](#)

" Work email FORMAL Instant messaging VERY INFORMAL Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Hyves) INFORMAL Business networking sites (e.g. LinkedIn) FORMAL Text message INFORMAL "

Feb 7



[Dreamer commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 4](#)

"Formal language should be use also for example when you give a talk in a conference where there are a lot of relevant people even more if you don't know them. On the other hand, you can use informal language in the same conference while you are..."

Feb 7



[Little Prince commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 4](#)

" I'd normally use informal language speaking with close friends, family or young people I meet in a non formal atmosphere, even if I don't know them very well. However, I'd chose formal language to speak with middle-aged and..."

Feb 7



[Little Prince commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 9](#)

" Work email --> Formal Instant messaging --> Informal Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Hyves) --> Informal Business networking sites (e.g. Linked-in) --> Formal Text message --> Informal "

Feb 7



[Researcher commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 9](#)

"Did you feel it was too long? I'll use the feedback from these tasks for the next task... and will give you then feedback."

298

Feb 7



[Researcher](#) left a [comment](#) for [eureka](#)

"Yes, listening twice is a good idea and enables you also to 'tune in' to the accent of the speaker. I'm pleased you enjoyed it!"

Feb 7



[Gabriel Syme](#) posted a blog post

[Task 2](#)

[Session2FormalityofSpeech-1.doc](#) Tooooooooooooo long.... 15 mins the listening is not too much, but everything and then the listening... uff. [See More](#)

Feb 6

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Brontë](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi, As I posted last Sunday, exercise 9 remained to be finished. I have just done it. Brontë."

Feb 6



[Brontë](#) posted a blog post

[Task 2 Exercise 9](#)

1.- Work email - formal, polite
Formal work emails are shorter and less formal than letters.- You should not use very informal language, incomplete sentences, exclamation marks or emotions.- You can use contracted verb forms, except where first impressions are important.- You can become less formal as you establish a working relationship with somebody.
2.- Instant messaging - informal
It is explicit, playful, both abbreviated and elaborated, and to emphasize meaning over form and social...[See More](#)

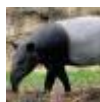
Feb 6



[eureka](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi! I've just finish task 2 and I think it was more enterntaining but longer at the same time. BBC Quiz and Interviews are quite difficult but well, I prefer listen to it twice to understand it well, it's more challenging for me!"

Feb 5



[Gabriel Syme commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 11](#)

"1.I beg your pardon, I would feel very dignified if you share this pretty evening. Thanks.
2.Hi brotha! Wassup? Wanna go party with me? Ain't no money but we gonna lol if we go out and get some chicks.
3.I'd have a tea if it doesn't..."

Feb 5



[Gabriel Syme commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 9](#)

"My god, this is long... Work email Formal Instant messaging Informal Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Hyves) Informal Business networking sites (e.g. Linked-in) Formal Text message Formal "

Feb 5



[Dreamer commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 3](#)

"These are my conversations. Cartoon A: - Dude, have you seen the match yesterday? It was awful! - Rather yukky, if we keep doing like that, the league is lost! Cartoon B: - I can confirm you that the payment has been done 5 minutes ago. -..."

Feb 4



[Gabriel Syme commented](#) on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 4](#)

"You can use informal language with family and friends and even young people that you don't know. You should use formal language with people related to you because of business and with older people."

Feb 4



[Gabriel Syme](#) commented on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 3](#)

"Should I post here the conversation that I wrote? As I don't know, I'll post it in white at the end of my answer, so it have to be selected to be read. The answer:
"

Feb 4



[Brontë](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi, The BBC quiz instructions were very clear. I had some difficulty in understanding the people speak English. Concerning the level of the activities, I think it is appropriate, mainly the listening exercises. I liked the one of the..."

Feb 4



[Researcher](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi Brontë Thank you for the feedback. It is difficult to think of examples on the spot. In terms of the BBC quiz, were the instructions clear or was it difficult to complete it? The tasks this week were indeed more challenging and I would have..."

Feb 4



[Brontë](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi, I have just finished this second task, but it is not complete as I couldn't find an interesting answer to exercise 9 concerning the type of language used in different methods of communication. I will do it over the week. I found the BBC..."

Feb 3



[Nemo](#) commented on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Task 2, Exercise 4](#)

"Another example of using informal language is when you are at the table with your family whereas the formal language is appropriate for example when you first meet your lawyer."

Feb 3

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Little Prince](#) posted a blog post

[Task 1](#)

[Task%201.docSee More](#)

Feb 2

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Splash](#) liked [Gabriel Syme's](#) blog post [Where is the new task?](#)

Feb 2



[Researcher](#) commented on [Gabriel Syme's](#) blog post [Where is the new task?](#)

"Hi Gabriel I'll release the task on Saturday. I have just posted Task 2 on the site.

I hope that this task is a little more challenging. Have fun! The researcher. "

Feb 2



[Gabriel Syme](#) posted a blog post

[Where is the new task?](#)

Was for yesterday and it's not here. [See More](#)

Feb 2

[1 Comment 1 Like](#)



[Susi](#) commented on [Researcher's](#) blog post [Feedback](#)

"I was a little lost at the beginning but it was ok. The task has been easy but i have had problems with the listening, probably because my connection now is running a little slow, i'll try to fix it."

Feb 1

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Gabriel Syme](#) posted a [status](#)

"Yup. Was easier than I thought"

Jan 29

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Researcher](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi all Thank you for the feedback. I will ensure that the next task will be more difficult.. to ensure that you all benefit from the tasks on Ning. Thank you The researcher"

Jan 29

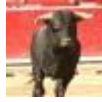


[Vitto](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hello! I finally have posted the first task, which was easy for me too..."

Jan 29

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[eureka](#) left a [comment](#) for [Researcher](#)

"Hi! I agree with my fellows. Perhaps it was so easy, but it has been the first one so you can try to complicate the activities gradually."

Jan 29



[Dreamer](#) posted a [status](#)

"Monkeys are similar to humans, but they know how to be happy all the time without worries, we should be even more alike them."

Jan 29

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)



[Dreamer](#) posted a [status](#)

"I have chosen this baby monkeys because they are so funny."

Jan 29

[0 Comments 0 Likes](#)

Appendix VIII Manual post tagging

Mrs Who – Pre assessment – question 13

Yes, of course! But ping-pong isn't my strong point, you know!

Anyway, why don't we go for a spree and go to Beyond Retro? And after that, let's have a drink at Loungelover, they have terrific cocktails and it's really close to the shop! FYI: <http://www.timeout.com/london/shopping/beyond-retro>
<http://www.timeout.com/london/bars-and-pubs/loungelover-e1>

See you!

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	4
Emphatic language	4
Exclamation marks	4
Informal nouns	1
Abbreviations	1
Features / word count	14 / 49
Features per word count	18%

Mrs Who – Post assessment – question 11

Hey John! How are things? Too much time without news from you! I hope you'll ok and meet in London after my exam in July!

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	1
Emphatic language	1
Exclamation marks	3
Informal nouns	1
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	6 / 25
Features per word count	24%

Canelo – Pre assessment – question 17

Great idea, playing ping pong, but you know I'm a bit clumsy! We'd better go to the London Eye (you only have to seat there and enjoy the views). Later on we can go to the Tate Modern Gallery, it's not far and we'll surely laugh about the works in there!

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	4
Emphatic language	2
Exclamation marks	2
Informal nouns	1
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	9 / 51
Features per word count	18%

Canelo – Post assessment – question 15

Hi, X, anybody there? U must be still sleeping... ;-) I've emailed you yesterday, but you didn't answer me! I've some important news...

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	3
Emphatic language	1
Exclamation marks	0
Informal nouns (& adjective)	2
Abbreviations	1
Features / word count	7 / 23
Features per word count	30%

Eureka – Pre assessment – question 21

Perhaps but, do you really like ping pong??? I think would be more interesting another kind of activities like a music festival

<http://www.timeout.com/london/music-festivals> or some alternatives at night
<http://www.timeout.com/london/alternative-nightlife>. But I don't mind!!!!

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	1
Emphatic language	2
Exclamation marks	5
Informal nouns	0
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	8/ 33
Features per word count	24%

Eureka – Post assessment – question 19

John!!!! are U there?? I'm still waiting for your reply about not going to England in July.

Please, contact with me it's really important!!!

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	2
Emphatic language	2
Exclamation marks	7
Informal nouns	0
Abbreviations	1
Features / word count	12/ 24
Features per word count	50%

Penguin – Pre assessment – question 25

Hiya, Good to hear from you. Sure, I'd love to - I'm not sure I'd be any good at it, though. Anyway, we'll try and we'll definitely have a great time together. I'd also love to go shopping in Carnaby St. and maybe we could have dinner in a fancy restaurant in East London, how about that?

I can't wait to see you!

Love,

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	7
Emphatic language	6
Exclamation marks	1
Informal nouns	3
Abbreviations	1
Features / word count	18/ 64
Features per word count	28%

Penguin – Post assessment – question 23

Hi! Haven't heard from you for a week now, what's up? My trip was awesome, I had a really great time. Hope we can talk soon and catch up.

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	2
Emphatic language	4
Exclamation marks	1
Informal nouns	2
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	9 / 29
Features per word count	31%

Zelda – Pre assessment – question 29

Booooooring... What about this?

<http://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/lesmiserables>

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	0
Emphatic language	1
Exclamation marks	0
Informal nouns	0
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	1 / 5
Features per word count	20%

Zelda – Post assessment – question 27

Susie!! I sent you an e-mail and had no answer!! Pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeease, write me ASAP!!

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	0
Emphatic language	1
Exclamation marks	4
Informal nouns	1
Abbreviations	1
Features / word count	7 / 14
Features per word count	50%

Other posts analysed

(not included in Stage Two of the study)

Anonymous – Pre assessment

H!

I see that although it's been a while since we last met you still remember my passion for ping pong! I've visited the page and couldn't find a better place where to spend the afternoon. I've seen that we can also stay there for dinner to make the !

most of it. So, tell me day and time and I'll be there

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	5
Emphatic language	3
Exclamation marks	3
Informal nouns	1

Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	12 / 62
Features per word count	19%

Anonymous 2 – Pre assessment

We can gonna play but not in this place it's very expensive, what about some dinner without exercise or a movie?

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	2
Emphatic language	1
Exclamation marks	0
Informal nouns	1
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	4 / 21
Features per word count	19%

I've checked out Bounce and I think it's a fantastic idea! I've been wandering

Anonymous 3 – Pre assessment

Hi!

around that website and I've found lots of other interesting places I'd really like to go to. You know that I love cycling, so I'd also like joining to The Secret London tour. I'm sure it'd be amazing to visit London on a bike. And what about doing something related to poetry? It's impossible to find those activities here! Can we go, for example, to Rhymes with Orange? I was reading about it and it seems very interesting!

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	9
Emphatic language	7
Exclamation marks	4
Informal nouns	3
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	23 / 93
Features per word count	25%

Anonymous 4 – Pre assessment

Hello friend,

Ok, Ping pong is Ok. But also, I'd like to being in London feeling like a londonaute, so What if we go to a tea shop to have a coffe at 17:00? Also, there is the Wembley Stadium. We could see some sport events in that. Do you like my idea?

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	1
Emphatic language	0
Exclamation marks	0
Informal nouns	3
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	4 / 51
Features per word count	7.8%

I'd love to play ping pong, as long as it's in Bounce... it's great

Anonymous 5 – Pre assessment

Hey!! I wanna visit it and see all the things it offers.

But also I'm gonna do the London marathon, as it'll be while I'm there. I know you love running, so we'll do it!

I also wanna see the Natural History Museum; I'm interested in others too, but this is a must.

See soon you !

X

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	11
Emphatic language	5
Exclamation marks	3
Informal nouns	1
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	20 / 70

Features per word count	29%
-------------------------	-----

I'd rather

Dreamer – Pre assessment

go to the Innovation Station where there are driving simulators or even to the Photographs Gallery. Both are free :D

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	1
Emphatic language	1
Exclamation marks	0
Informal nouns	1
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	3 / 22
Features per word count	14%

Mulan – Pre assessment

Yeah!! I'd love it! And what about a dinner in a placelike this ?:

<http://www.timeout.com/london/cabaret/the-black-cat>

Or here! <http://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/faulty-towers-the-diningexperience>

I think I need more nights!!
xD

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	1
Emphatic language	1
Exclamation marks	4
Informal nouns	3
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	9 / 25
Features per word count	36%

Prue – Pre assessment

Wow, I really love the idea. I'm in :) I saw in the web page two things could

love totally
 be interesting to do: Sarah Lucas' exhibition (I saw the pictures and they're hilarious)and to see the dresses were used in the film Anna Karenina. So, what to you thing?

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	1
Emphatic language	5
Exclamation marks	0
Informal nouns	0
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	6 / 50
Features per word count	12%

Bronte – Pre assessment

Yeah, sure. Then I fancy something to eat. Been told of a called "Princess Louise" not far from Bounce, and what about a film as the fittin' finale?

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	1
Emphatic language	1
Exclamation marks	0
Informal nouns	2
Abbreviations	1
Features / word count	5 / 29
Features per word count	17%

Little Prince – Post assessment

Hey!!! Are you alive? Have you thought about what I told you? Tell me what you think asap, please!

Manual tagged	Count
---------------	-------

Contractions	0
Emphatic language	1
Exclamation marks	5
Informal nouns	1
Abbreviations	1
Features / word count	8 / 19
Features per word count	42%

Prue – Post assessment

Hey. How's it going? I have started looking thing we can see and places we can go shopping in London. I leave the details in the e-mail. So, what do you think? Do you like the places? Please let me know soon, so I can plan the whole thing. Lots of kisses

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	1
Emphatic language	2
Exclamation marks	0
Informal nouns	1
Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	4 / 52
Features per word count	8%

I can't go to England this summer...I didn't pass my exams...see you other

Anonymous – Post assessment

Hey! time? I need an answer!

Manual tagged	Count
Contractions	2
Emphatic language	1
Exclamation marks	2
Informal nouns	0

Abbreviations	0
Features / word count	5 / 19
Features per word count	26%

Appendix IX Data analysis of the findings

Table 19 Average features of the informal register pre and post-intervention as per combined analysis (CLAWS, MAT and manual) for all participants (n=15)

	Average Pre intervention, per 100 words	Average Post intervention, per 100 words
Contractions	7%	6%
Emphatic language	6%	7%
Exclamation marks	4%	12%
Informal nouns & adverbs	3%	5%
Abbreviations	<1%	3%
Features per word count	20%	33%

Table 20 Paired samples T-test comparing linguistic effect of the intervention study

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences				t
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	

				Lower	Upper	
Pre-intervention - Pair 1 Post-intervention	-.15400	.11349	.05075	-.29492	-.01308	-3.034

Paired Samples Test

	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 Preintervention - Postintervention	4	.039

Table 21 Features of informal register in posting data per Stage One participant (n=5, manually tagged)

Manual tagged	13	11	17	15	21	19	25	23	29	27
Contractions	4	1	4	3	1	2	7	2	0	0
Emphatic language	4	1	2	1	2	2	6	4	1	1
Exclamation marks	4	3	2	0	5	7	1	1	0	4
Informal nouns	1	1	1	2	0	0	3	2	0	1
Abbreviations	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
Features / word count	14 / 49	6 / 25	9 / 51	7 / 23	8 / 33	12 / 24	18 / 64	9 / 29	1 / 5	7 / 14
Features per 100 words	18 %	24 %	18 %	30 %	24 %	50 %	28 %	31 %	20 %	50 %

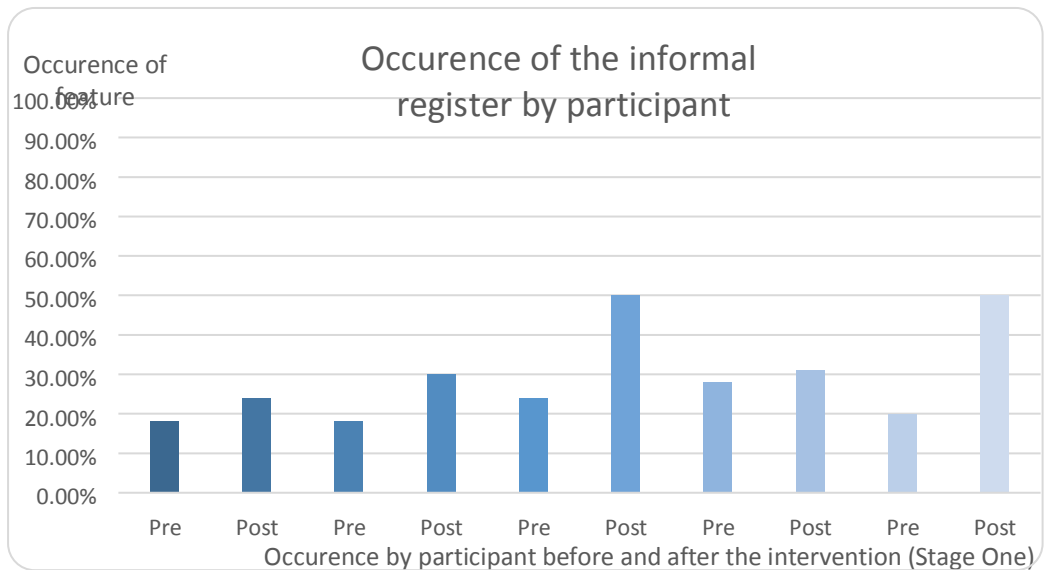


Figure 60 Visualisation of features of informal register in posting data per Stage One participant per 100 words

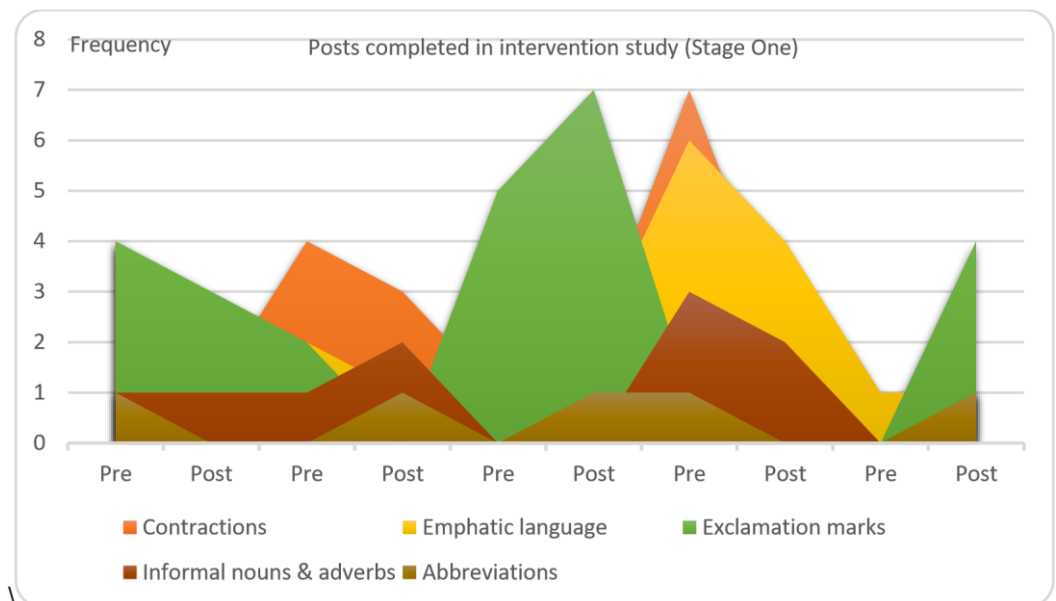


Figure 61 Visualisation of categorised features of the informal register (manually tagged)

Correlations

	Q5	Average Q11 to Q29		
Kendall's tau_b	Q5	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.816
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.221
		N	50	3
	Average Q11 to Q29	Correlation Coefficient	-.816	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.221	.
		N	3	3

Table 22 Correlation between age and average perception

Table 23 Categorized linguistic features of the informal register versus word count

			Contractions	Emphatic language	Exclamation marks
Kendall's tau_b	Contractions	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.634*	-.096
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.021	.713
		N	10	10	10
	Emphatic language	Correlation Coefficient	.634*	1.000	.078
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	.	.774
		N	10	10	10
Exclamation	Correlation Coefficient	-.096	.078	1.000	

marks	Sig. (2-tailed)	.713	.774	.
	N	10	10	10
Informal nouns	Correlation Coefficient	.475	.314	-.496
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.084	.273	.069
	N	10	10	10
Abbreviations	Correlation Coefficient	.312	.135	.154
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.290	.661	.598
	N	10	10	10
Features per word count	Correlation Coefficient	-.193	-.104	.119
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.462	.702	.647
	N	10	10	10

Table 25 Paired Samples Statistics all participants versus those with knowledge of Spanish

Paired Samples Statistics all participants versus those with knowledge of Spanish

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1				
VAR00006	5.60	10	2.797	.884
VAR00007	1.30	10	4.111	1.300

Paired Samples Correlations

	N	Correlation	Sig.

Pair 1	VAR00006 & VAR00007	10	-.201	.578
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Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences							Sig. (2tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 VAR00006 - VAR00007	4.300	5.417	1.713	.425	8.175	2.510	9	.033

Appendix X Feedback from the students' tutor

Hi Lisette,

It was my pleasure to help you. The students' overall feeling of the project is positive, but they say that the exercises were too easy for their level. I think they all enjoyed it.

Yeah, it'd be great to meet up in Glasgow. This afternoon I'm off to Valencia to a conference and I've got my presentation tomorrow evening. Hope it'll go well. Yesterday I started a new project with a group of students at a university in Mauritius. The participants from this end are the ones who were in yours. That's why I delayed the start of my project. My students enjoyed these project tasks because they're different from text-book learning.

If you need anything else, please let me know.

Good luck with the next stage of your project and keep in touch.

All the best

Ruby

timmi