

MOTIVATING LANGUAGE LEARNERS FROM BEFORE ADMISSION TO AFTER GRADUATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract of the Presentation

This presentation will demonstrate how language learners can be motivated not only beyond classes but before and after their years in higher education. Cases of social media will include social networking services, podcasting, online video, and various forms of online presentations and publications. Learners are reached through their familiar media channels and find out about new technologies. From the learner side, campus English contest entries and Computer Communication class activities are turned into student-generated content (Sener, 2007; Lee & McLoughlin, 2007) with recognition from abroad. Students are no longer a passive audience of uncommitted spectators but rather active creators in the target language community. Goals of language learning enter real life as bilingual and bicultural choices. The teacher no longer descends from a remote power distance into temporary juxtaposition with students, but rather, as Dörnyei (2001) recommends, sustains personal relationships to motivate students. An interviewed student shows both instrumental and integrative motivation, and that formal performances motivate her to master English. There are indications needing further study across cultures that online social media can enhance these motivational effects.

1 Introduction to This Article

This proceedings article focuses on cases of utilizing new affordances of online social media at a college to reach and motivate foreign language learners from secondary school to after college graduation. First, referring to the conference theme, the meaning of media in the widest sense is explored along with the often taken-for-granted role of media in perception and communication. Then the discussion turns to online presentations, social media and social networking sites

(SNS) in particular, utilizing Japan's Mixi as an example. The presentation itself in early December of 2008 will provide more contextualization and theory with the philosophy alluded to in the Abstract. This article refers to related publications for further study, most often in the form of links because the other articles are available online. Alternatively, after reading this article, the reader can browse all of the linked articles together, along with currently forthcoming publications, at the author's online library, the Bilingualism and Japanology Intersection: <http://waoe.org/steve/epublist.html>, or the fuller version of links annotated in Japanese: <http://waoe.org/steve/jpublist.html>.

2 Online Social Media

The CLaSIC 2008 theme "Media in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning" first raises the question of what media in the broadest sense are, and what media do. Media function like prisms between phenomena and perception, infrastructural communication channels to represent objects to human subjects, where the phenomena or objects could be conceptual as well as physical. Even the sense of sight takes phenomena through a certain apparatus before an object is perceived. Then there may be secondary process thinking, with possible awareness of contents and patterns. Objects are not perceived directly but through media, and the perceptions of different individuals cannot come into contact directly except as intermediated by a common prism or shared medium. The media may be multiple and changing over time, thus changing perceptions even of the same phenomena. Each successive medium redefines the previous media and renders them identifiable in terms of paradigms. The implications of an accelerating succession of new educational media were explored in an earlier presentation (McCarty, 2005a).

Not long ago, the above presentation may have been over at the time, but a podcast was recorded at the time in Australia and posted from Japan to a site in Canada with a photo of Queensland at <http://stevemc.blogmatrix.com/:entry:stevemc-2005-09-22-0000/>, and the PowerPoint presentation can be viewed at any time by clicking through the slides at <http://www.slideshare.net/waoe/definitions-and-knowledge-in-successive-educational-media/>. That is to say, the synchronous event also became asynchronous, and the number of media through which the same presentation can be perceived has multiplied. Online presentations can be accomplished in many different ways, one of which is to stack a slide show on top of its podcast by capturing the code

of the contents and players from different sites and embedding the code in a blog post. Technologies will be drawn from this repertoire later in showcasing college students' English performances to a global audience.

Considering the above discussion of online presentations in terms of media rather than technology highlights a fact that is often overlooked: that media are a sort of dimension, particularly in work that involves communication, such as education and research. It would present a certain challenge if only the medium of radio were available to describe the world of television. Most readers can recall when only paper with few illustrations carried the burden of abstractly representing various phenomena, or citing a fragment to represent some source, whereas now the convenience of linking has opened up new perspectives and ways of thinking. One publication does not just refer to others, but is connected to them, incorporating them through hypertext, which makes a larger statement involving the significance of media.

As the media are successive, televised analysis can describe radio more comprehensively than the reverse, and online media can be most comprehensive, with the previously taken-for-granted media redefined as offline and so forth. With this introduction, when it comes to *social media*, the Internet is the appropriate place to find its definition, and Wikipedia could be a suitable source not least because wikis are an example of social media. A Google definition search on the terms *define:social media* on October 13, 2008 yielded five results including the Wikipedia entry. The first definition was succinct and to the point of this presentation:

social media: A category of sites that is based on user participation and user-generated content. They include social networking sites like LinkedIn or Facebook, social bookmarking sites like Del.icio.us, social news sites like Digg or Reddit, and other sites that are centered on user interaction. (Search Engine Watch, 2008).

Wikipedia gives examples of the wide variety of sites that can be considered social media:

Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures and video. Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing, and voice over IP, to name a few. Examples of social media

applications are Google Groups (reference, social networking), Wikipedia (reference), MySpace (social networking), Facebook (social networking), Youmeo (social network aggregation), Last.fm (personal music), YouTube (social networking and video sharing), Avatars United (social networking), Second Life (virtual reality), Flickr (photo sharing), Twitter (social networking and microblogging) and other microblogs such as Jaiku and Pownce. Many of these social media services can be integrated via social network aggregation platforms like Mybloglog and Plaxo. (Wikipedia, 2008)

Wikipedia distinguishes social media from industrial media, also called mainstream or mass media:

Social media are distinct from industrial media, such as newspapers, television, and film. While social media are relatively cheap tools that enable anyone (even private individuals) to publish or access information, industrial media are relatively expensive tools that generally require significant financial capital to publish information (which often limits their use to commercial purposes). (Wikipedia, 2008)

Besides the empowerment of individuals involved, social media can rival industrial media in the parameters of reach, accessibility, usability and recency (Wikipedia, 2008). Few mainstream outlets have a greater global audience (reach), more frequent updates (recency), or ease and affordability of viewing and especially production of content (accessibility, usability) than social media. Among social networking sites (SNS), Facebook, MySpace, Cyworld (South Korea), QQ (China), and Mixi (Japan) each has tens of millions of users. Other Internet sites among the world's most often visited, such as YouTube, include social media functions such as posting comments, tagging keywords, embedding code in blogs, and other forms of sharing. The user-generated recommendations constitute a form of meritocracy that in turn influences what kinds of functions, sites and media will be developed next. The artificial online environment thus serves users better by coming into closer accord with human nature. There are also cultural preferences, where for example the functions of Mixi are found to reinforce pre-existing Japanese patterns of social relations (McCarty, in press).

For the purposes of this brief article, a glimpse of Mixi will give a flavor for this particular SNS. As the interface is only available in the Japanese language, parts of the screen shot are translated, while some of the main functions are enumerated below. While Mixi will be referenced at times in this article, the

reader can substitute another SNS in considering similar issues in reaching students. For a fuller discussion of Mixi, how it was used with students, its technological limitations and cultural significance, see the related papers and online presentations linked from <http://waoe.org/steve/epublist.html>

Fig. 1: Upper part of a Web page of a Mixi User's Site

3 Motivating Language Learners Before Admission

Online social media open up new opportunities for college representatives to reach the wider community. With the low birth rate in East Asia, the number of high school seniors declines significantly every year, intensifying the competition among colleges (including universities) to reach their quotas of new student admissions for government subsidies and institutional survival. For secondary school students, grammar-translation methods of English teaching can demotivate students before they realize the possible rewards of English for International Communication. Thus colleges with English-related departments are pursuing every avenue to bring their merits to the attention of prospective students. The Web and social media are where young people are looking for information and gathering, so college staff members need computer literacy in online technologies. Faculty members are drawn into outreach efforts, placed in a humbler yet broader role in education as a service profession. Student enrollments are not guaranteed, so good practices in teaching become more important, and research skills can be turned to community service. Young people are not automatically motivated toward a foreign language, and teachers in East Asia are expected to provide such motivation. Teachers can agree with many of the goals of these extra outreach efforts and aim to promote bilingualism through a more positive view of English for International Communication.

This is the case of one faculty member in Japan within the past year, with an emphasis on social media. While the college may be focused on attracting students from Western Japan to central Osaka, when information appears on the open Web, not password-protected sites, the potential audience is global. More specifically, Japanese language information has a national audience and English assumes a wider potential but a much smaller audience within Japan.

For the sake of completeness on outreach efforts, it could be mentioned that

regional high school students occasionally join English seminars at Osaka Jogakuin College (OJC), while OJC teachers give demonstration classes at high schools that conduct events for colleges in the region. For example, the author teaches a communicative English class while other colleges present other subjects, and students of the high school choose which sessions to attend as they consider their choices of college and major. There are also the demonstration classes at Open Campus events for high school seniors considering whether or not to apply, and the classes are similar in content to actual lessons in the content-based EFL curriculum. Such events could be publicized.

Furthermore, for two years in a row OJC has been the site of a two-day summer seminar for junior high school students, which had support from Osaka Prefecture the first year, then just organizational support in 2008 from a consortium of Osaka area colleges and universities (the same consortium appears in Figure 3 in a different context). The author was asked to write an article about the seminar for an online campus publication. Considering the audience, the author volunteered to write the article in Japanese. First year junior high school students were most numerous, just months out of elementary school and beginning regular English classes, so it was challenging to design interesting activities for most of two days, changing every half hour, and teaching in English insofar as possible. Part of the article (McCarty, 2008a) is reproduced below from the college Intranet. At this stage, the college wishes to use such accomplishments for outreach, but policies need to be established to assuage concerns such as protection of personal information privacy under Japanese law before campus reportage can be released on the open Web.

Fig. 2: Part of an Article on the Summer English Seminar for Junior High School Students

This year is not claimed to be representative for an EFL faculty member in Japan or for the author, but is perhaps indicative of a trend where a broader range of college outreach efforts draw faculty members into applying their pedagogical, research and writing skills outside of the regular classroom. While the discussion thus far may have served to introduce the current sociocultural setting, the connection to the theme of this presentation becomes clearer when the resulting product is documented on the open Web or in social media. A case in point occurred in connection with the already-mentioned consortium where institutions share an interest in drawing students into the hub of Osaka from surrounding

regions while displaying their comparative strengths to secondary school students already living within commuting distance. The consortium invites all its members to submit articles by representative students and faculty members for the Website (shown in Figure 3 below), which are updated as often as once a month. Young people themselves tend to prefer the big cities with their amenities and jobs available, so the site provides a service in that sense. Faculty articles are ostensibly about the attractions of studying in the Osaka area, with indirect publicity through the affiliation of the author in the byline, and these articles are of course in Japanese to reach the most potential students. OJC takes a different approach, as a college of English majors, and designated the author to write an article (McCarty, 2008b), which in simple English introduces the merits of studying in Osaka.

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受験生のためのWEBサイト
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▶ **This is Osaka**

日本語版著作リンク集「バイリンガリズムと日本学」:
<http://waoe.org/steve/jpublist.html>

This is Osaka, where you can be different!

Osaka is the center of western Japan. People from many regions visit or stay in Osaka. This has made Osaka the largest city in western Japan. Osaka is the center of Kansai, the second largest region in Japan. Osaka also has a wide variety of people, including minorities and foreigners. This means that people in Osaka accept differences. People who accept differences can be friendly to strangers. On TV we often see personalities who are from Osaka. They show that Osaka people are fun-loving and friendly.

Students especially enjoy living in Osaka. Trains run as often as every few minutes during the rush hours. Trains run until late at night, so students can enjoy the night life

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Fig. 3: Part of an Online Article for Students considering Higher Education in Osaka

Finally, with regard to reaching students before admission, two striking examples involve the use of social media, specifically the social networking site or service (SNS) Mixi, which the author has also used to reach students between classes and even after graduation. Mixi allows members, besides following site updates by

their circle of friends, to freely join topical communities. There is a community for OJC as a whole with over 700 members, which the author joined to offer motivational encouragement. It may be objectionable to copy others' posts from a password-protected members' site, so the students' messages are simply described as follows. In February of 2008 a bulletin board system (BBS) thread started with a student who was accepted for the school year starting in April of 2008 asking if there were others like her in the community. She was clearly trying to get a head start on networking to make friends, and indeed there were 44 replies to her post, including by the author, responding to her Japanese message but in English, welcoming new students. Then, antedating a possible admission even further, in September of 2008 a high school senior posted a message to the community saying that she was thinking of applying to the 2-year division of OJC for April of 2009. She was not confident in her English achievement but was interested and willing to try. This time the author responded to the Japanese message again in English but expressing reassurance and encouragement of her efforts. Among the many smilies that one can choose from in Mixi, the author selected the animated image of an archer shooting an arrow to symbolize her striving toward that goal.

4 Online Activities with College Students

The content-based EFL curriculum at OJC involves teaching topic discussion, reading, writing, and some other subjects *in* English, yet incoming students cannot be assumed to have the requisite listening comprehension skills for such immersive classes. Thus, since the entrance ceremony in early 2004, OJC became the first college in the world where all students received iPods. Moreover, the iPods were loaded with college-created listening files for the students to use before starting classes, and then for homework in certain classes. The chronology is detailed along with the technology of podcasting in McCarty (2005b), which is available online (see References).

For each content-based EFL class the author teaches, the syllabus indicates the instructor's e-mail address and a class Website or blog post of links for the class. When the author's first or second year students of core courses have excelled in campus-wide contests, the author has recorded their peace dialogue or presentation as a podcast with the transcript linked for the sake of EFL students anywhere. This student-generated content (Sener, 2007; Lee & McLoughlin, 2007) has received recognition from abroad, which confirms the global audience to the students and is hypothesized to enhance their integrative motivation

(McCarty, in press). Instrumental motivation evidently predominates in East Asia, but it is reasoned that for students to be active content creators in the target language community represents a transformation in perspective. Students can see that the instructor appreciates their work and gives extra time to placing it online, so they are motivated at least to reciprocate. The authentic collaboration to place student products online sustains personal teacher-student relationships, which Dörnyei (2001) recommends to motivate students.

In 2006 the author experimented with coursecasting, that is, podcasting the lecture parts of each class for a semester course in Bilingual Education, plus two related public lectures at other universities in Osaka during the same semester by bilingualism researcher Fred Genesee from McGill University in Canada. The podcasting blog “Coursecasting Bilingual Education” at <http://www.odeo.com/channels/93074> was thus available for students at the time to review, for students enrolled in later years, or for anyone who found the site through a search engine keyword search or otherwise.

The author’s Computer Communication class is most suitable for a variety of Web 2.0 activities, some of which have been posted online. One was a narrated slide show where the student introduced her home region through her voice and photos of the scenery. Including the podcasts, students’ own photos and other personal information are not shown, out of caution, but their voices are heard and they still find it exciting. A voice comment posted to the online narrated slide show by an EFL educator in Europe was a pleasant surprise to the student, again showing the global audience and appreciation of the student’s work in the target language community. In another instance, the instructor collaborated with students on a YouTube video about the Mixi social networking site. The students were genuine resources on the Japanese-language site and gave frank opinions about how teachers might be regarded in students’ social networks. Cf. “Social Networking in Japanese Student Territory with Mixi” at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXBwr6gMrrM>.

How the author approached several classes about Mixi and what it revealed about Japanese socioculture in new media is dealt with extensively in McCarty (in press). For the focus of this brief article, why and how to keep in touch with students after semesters are over and even after graduation are considered next.

5 Contacting Students After Graduation with Social Media

Having developed personal teacher-student relationships, as Dörnyei (2001) recommends, it is natural for both sides to wish to stay in touch, and the technology of SNS makes it easy and convenient to do so. Until recently, contact with students could end abruptly after the current semester, and when students graduate they lose their campus e-mail, blog, and learning management system (LMS) accounts. But the teacher might wish to follow milestones in former students' lives, for example whether or not they are applying the EFL skills they learned in college in the workplace or society. If the teacher and students became SNS friends, in Mixi in this instance, the teacher could send out occasional messages of encouragement along with personal and professional milestones in blog posts with multimedia such as photos or YouTube videos. Students would be reminded in the case of a foreign instructor that part of their world is this cross-cultural relationship where they can use English for authentic communication. A teacher could finally do longitudinal research with student subjects after they graduate. Various new possibilities are opened up by the use of social media.

As an example, in late 2007 the author interviewed a student in her last semester for research, and then she had graduated by the time the author compiled the interview data in 2008. Without knowing her new e-mail, mobile phone or any other contact information, it was still possible to reach her through the Mixi messaging system to confirm that the English data for publication meant exactly what she had intended. Not knowing students' contact information, as one's institution may prefer, protects both teacher and students from possible suspicions about motives, yet the parties can remain in touch at a safe distance as Mixi friends or through other such social media.

6 Conclusion

It has been shown to be useful to apply online technologies such as social media to be able to reach students where they look for information or congregate socially. To reach and motivate language learners not only outside of class but from before admission to after graduation represents a paradigm shift in what it can possibly mean to be an educator in society. Teachers can now, for instance, find out more about the long-term results of their teaching in their students' actual lives. Conversely, students can continue to draw motivation from messages to them or milestones in the teacher's life and research posted to social media. The potential teachable moments or opportunities to enhance students' motivation to communicate with the L2 target community are virtually unlimited.

When the teacher utilizes technologies that students use, generational and other sociocultural barriers can be surmounted. Furthermore, if the teacher utilizes cutting-edge technologies that students would like to learn, a motivational sense of challenge can be kindled. If the teacher can do it, perhaps she can, and the teacher becomes a model of technological empowerment as well as of bilingualism.

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