ACTION RESEARCH THE USE OF INSTAGRAM AS AN INTERACTIVE TOOL FOR DEVELOPING THE WRITING OF SHORT STORIES

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Abstract:

Despite a significant volume of research concerning the role of social networks in L2 education, has been worldwide disseminated, this is an emerging research area in Chile, specifically regarding the role of Instagram as an interactional learning tool for supporting the production of written short stories in junior level students. This research proposes a perspective by investigating how a social network like Instagram and the socio pragmatic awareness arising from it (Prichard 2013; Blattner and Lomicka 2012) may turn into a useful tool for developing the writing of short stories in a group of 6th grade students in a bilingual school in Chile. In the same way, it sets out how corrective feedback combined with Instagram may also help in the developing of writing short stories. Furthermore, the present study provides an analysis of students' perception of using Instagram to improve their writing. The sample consisted of ten 6th grade students with age range from 11 to 12 years, all belonging to upper junior level from a private school in Concepción, Chile. None of them was a native English speaker and they all had at least elementary level English language proficiency. The participants were selected by using a convenience sampling method. The data tools used in the following research for gathering information were: two written tasks (short stories), an analytic rubric (adapted from the CEFR) to assess their writing tasks and a student

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Focus Group. To analyze the gathered data, two techniques were used: simple percentage analysis and a thematic analysis. The findings from this research revealed rather contradictory results as the analytic rubric showed an improvement in the writing process of short stories; however, the student focus group interview revealed that learners did not consider the use of Instagram (or its socio pragmatic awareness) as a contributing factor in their writing improvement.

Keywords: Instagram, socio-pragmatic awareness, corrective feedback

1. Introduction

The emergence of globalization and the digital era have transformed all human relationships, affecting the way we interact with each other, and deeply altering the acquisition of knowledge and literacy education. This new way of interacting and communicating is questioning the traditional classroom environments. As Lave and Wenger (1991, p.12) pointed out, "*these technologies re-defined what it means to know, understand, and become a 'literate' or an 'educated citizen*". With the globalization of information rapidly increasing, people (especially youths), become part of a digital audience that is expected to apply knowledge adequately. Therefore, it is critical for learners to master these new technologies to compete for further progression in their educational life.

The current study emerges from one particular issue observed during a writing lesson developed for 6th graders in a private bilingual school in Concepción. This is related to a difficulty that students experience at the time of writing short stories based on a sequence of pictures. They show a lack of proper connectors to link sequences of actions or confuse the use of first and third person singular to narrate ideas in simple present. This problem arose in the Flyers Exam´s preparation sessions students must take as part of the school requirements.

Thus, as a way of improving these students´ academic performance in the writing task, the school suggested the use of practical writing activities supported by corrective feedback.

1.1 Digital literacy environment and L2 education
From the moment when the 'web 2.0' era started in 2004, the way we learn languages has experienced dramatic changes (Blattner and Fiori, 2009; Prichard, 2013; Kessler, 2013). According to Ellis (2008) before that period, the acquisition of a second language was through naturally occurring social interactions with others (naturalistic) or through

the formal delivery and reception of knowledge (instructed study). Nowadays, despite the formal delivery of knowledge, its naturalistic acquisition is gaining an important place as people learn by interacting in virtual environments where they feel comfortable with others that share the same interests and act as collaborators of their learning. This provokes the expansion of the learning scope, through extended learning opportunities beyond the classrooms.

1.2 Social networks and L2 education, socio pragmatic awareness and Instagram as a pedagogical resource

As it was previously mentioned, new ways of learning a second or foreign language have their foundations in Vygotsky´s social cultural theory of using social networking, where students can learn better with non-linear techniques of communication among them (1978). Hence, it is necessary and meaningful to explore the function of social networking sites to develop activities for EFL classrooms.

Within the virtual digital environment, social networks (SNs) are known as dynamic online services, platforms, or sites that focus on building and reflecting of social relations among people. Here, participants construct their own communication nets and not only receive information as passive audience, thus the learning power availability is greatly boosted. Within the educational field, these social network services have also been found to improve language skills and absorption of the target culture (Kabilan et al., 2010; Klimanova and Dembovskaya, 2010).

Furthermore, SNs provide learners with the ability to engage themselves in meaningful social and cultural exchanges with native speakers and other L2 learners (Harrison and Thomas, 2009). Here, learners in this public setting may feel their text has greater authenticity and audience in comparison to traditional writing, which may only be viewed by a teacher (Prichard, 2013; Blattner and Fiori, 2009). Besides, some researchers emphasize that "*reading the posts of native speakers of the target language on SNs has also been found to improve reading skills and absorption of the target culture*" (Kabilan et al., 2010; Klimanova and Dembovskaya, 2010).

Regarding sociopragmatic awareness, the term is categorized as a communicative competency, where (as the foundational concept pragmatics explains) the user recognizes the way in which language is used to encode social meaning through conscious reflection of relationships among factors involved in pragmatic comprehension and production. As in traditional settings, under this perspective the virtual learning communities of SNs are "*expected to promote negotiation of meaning, and if it does so, this should be beneficial for language acquisition*" (Chapelle, 2003, p.56). However, despite of the fact traditional learning settings and virtual ones may share the creation

of a socio pragmatic awareness through collaborative work; the new learning environments promote the expansion of sociopragmatics. According to Prichard (2013), its dimensions are extended in the context of SNs because learners in a public setting feel any kind of text they write has greater authenticity, impact and purpose in comparison to traditional writing, as the audience they have (contacts or followers) is higher and their product will not only will be viewed by a single teacher or their classmates.

In this way, language educators should not disregard the raising of socio pragmatic awareness in their learners, but they should try to promote this competence in the L2 curriculum despite it may be difficult to implement it. Regarding this issue, Pearson (2006) underscored that L2 pragmatic instructional materials should come from authentic sources, which means that Facebook and other SNs provide such sources as all of the interactions within those social networks come from real speakers, using authentic everyday language.

Contrary to the assertion that socio pragmatic awareness cannot be detached from the SNs´ virtual environments, it is often ignored in foreign and second language classrooms as it was demonstrated by a study carried out by Blattner and Fiori (2011). Moreover, "*after having received traditional classroom instruction that neglect sociopragmatics as part of second language development will produce students who are unable to elaborate real world speech contextualized in real settings*" (Dewaele, 2004, p.301).

With respect to Instagram, currently it is one of the most popular tools in the world with over 800 million active users ("Instagram: active users", 2017). Its objective is to post individual images or videos with a description on their profile. Some 70 million images and videos are posted daily. Therefore, Instagram seems to provide an ideal environment for L2 learners or foreign language learners to produce narrative writing due to the easiness for uploading photographs plus the unlimited number of words to describe images or comment any picture. Different researchers have found that "*teen Instagram users expressed excitement about the platform, noticing the absence of "drama"* such as is found on Facebook as well as the opportunities for creative expression" (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith & Beaton, 2013). In just the last four years, Instagram has expanded over 200 million monthly active users.

With the advent of Instagram, the scope of learning has suffered a noticeable expansion, particularly in the types of intelligence that it can cover. According to Phillips (2013), using Instagram in educational settings may deliver different benefits. In the case of spatial intelligence, Instagram uses it by exploiting any kind of visual stimulus such as pictures, maps, images, etc. allowing students' brains interpret certain types of incoming information more than with traditional sources. This by judging

distances, sizes and other aspects of an object, when viewing them or when editing pictures. Furthermore, Instagram encourages students to use their language skills, for example when teachers upload pictures and share them with their students and ask them to make observations, comments or provide specific types of feedback. Likewise, logical mathematical intelligence can be put to use when teachers share some pictures with the students and ask them to work on them. Through Instagram learners can detect patterns, evaluate problems and think logically. Moreover, interpersonal intelligence is reinforced through this tool as it encourages students to comprehend desires, motivations and intentions of others. This means that through the use of Instagram teachers can engage the students in group activities.

In general, terms, Instagram can increase student collaboration and encourage more participation as it provides chances for students to easily contact one another regarding school projects, group assignments or for help on homework assignments. Lastly, while this tool does not completely replace a traditional class where participation is one important factor, it can help some students who do not have an active role in their class as they feel troubled at expressing in normal conditions. Hence, Instagram helps build their confidence and encourages them to find their voice and be able to participate.

1.3 Corrective feedback in the writing process

While feedback is essential for encouraging and consolidating learning (Anderson, 1982) being an important instrument for learners, Hyland and Hyland (2006) argue that it is a fundamental element for educators who employ scaffolded learning techniques which in turn encourage the development of L2 writing. Its effects can be positive for learning, whether it is used alone or together with other strategies for improving the acquisition of knowledge. Keh (1990) defines feedback as "teacher's input to a writer's composition in the form of information to be used for revision" (p. 294). It is also described as describe it as information provided by teachers to help students trouble-shoot their performance (Nicole and Macfarlane, 2004).

2. Research Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to assess the effectiveness of using Instagram to develop the writing of short stories in a group of 6th graders from junior level in a bilingual school.

The specific objectives were set as follows:

1. To describe the extent to which the use of Instagram develops students' socio pragmatic awareness when writing short stories.
2. To analyze the extent to which the use of corrective feedback improves participants´ writing skill development of short stories.
3. To identify participants´ perceptions of the use Instagram when writing short stories.
4. To compare and contrast the results of writing short stories through the use of Instagram and through the use of a traditional method.

2. Method

The following study is a qualitative investigation within the action research design. On one hand, this research follows an action-oriented approach that applies a small-scale theorizing about a specific problem in a particular situation and aims to problematize the spotted issue expressing it under a research question (Reason, 1994; Stringer, 2007b).

2.1 Participants

The sample comprised 9 students from a 6th grade class, upper junior level from a private bilingual school in Concepción. Their age ranged from 11 to 12 years old. None of them was a native English speaker and they all had at least elementary level English language proficiency. Their average grade in the English subject before the intervention ranged from 6.7 to 5.5 in a grading scale from 1 to 7. A convenience sampling method was used to select the participants as they were readily available to be recruited and monitored during all of the stages of the intervention since they were part of the class under research. (Creswell, 2012).

3. Procedure

3.1 Data collection techniques

In order to assess the effectiveness of using Instagram as a tool to develop the writing of short stories in a group of 6th graders, it was necessary to collect the participants' short stories written without the use of Instagram (Pre-writing stage) and their written samples supported by Instagram (Post-writing stage). The process continued with a detailed revision of the texts and the provision of the corresponding corrective feedback. Three writing tasks were used in the present research study:

Task one consisted of a pen and paper writing test (Pre-writing stage without using Instagram), where participants had to describe a sequence of pictures similar to

the one from Flyers Exam (60-70 words). The participants´ short stories were assessed and oral and written corrective feedback was given. The purpose was to obtain a first impression about their writing skill regarding short stories and further to set out a comparison with their writing after using Instagram.

Task two and three consisted of writing a 60-70-word short story using Instagram, based on two more picture sequences similar to the one found in Flyers Exam. All of these writing tasks were assessed with an analytic rubric adapted from the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) considering six criteria: Creative Writing, Vocabulary Range, Grammatical Accuracy, Coherence, Orthographic Control and Number of Words.

After collecting and assessing the participants' written short stories, a second technique was used to complement students´ complete experience of using a social network tool with a pedagogical purpose. A student Focus group was used to obtain data about their perceptions on the use of Instagram, corrective feedback and the raising of socio pragmatic awareness. In the interview, the participants had to answer nine open questions about two different dimensions: general view about the tool and perception of the tool in terms of writing development.

3.2 Data analysis techniques

The data processing used two techniques: simple percentage analysis and thematic analysis. The simple percentage analysis was used to compare the Pre-writing task (without Instagram) and the Post-writing task (with Instagram). Its aim was to show statistical data explaining the participants´ possible increase in their level of achievement regarding their development in the short story writing activity.

On the other hand, a thematic analysis was carried out based on the student Focus Group through the selection of the most relevant themes that emerged from the responses transcription. Comments and responses given by the participants were divided into two dimensions: General view about the tool (Instagram) and students´ perception of the tool in terms of their writing development. These two dimensions were subdivided into three main aspects: themes, frequency and samples of comments provided by the participants.

4. Results

The results of the students´ performance per criterion were obtained by summing up the points per student (9 participants) in each criterion and then dividing the result by the maximum score per criterion (36 points).

4.1 Student´s writing performance per criterion

The data analysis related to the comparison of students´ writing performance per criterion between the Pre-writing (without Instagram) and Post-writing (with Instagram) (Table 1) revealed an increase in five out of the six criteria of the rubric used. Only one criterion showed a decrease in students´ level of achievement. The results showed that students increased 11.1% in the Creative Writing criterion and in Vocabulary Range there was a 22.2% of improvement. In the case of Coherence, it was observed an increase of 2.8%. And regarding the criteria Orthographic Control, there was also a noticeable improvement of 25%, reaching the highest percentage of achievement (100%). The Number of words criterion also showed a 90% of achievement in the Post-writing. This represented an increase of 25% in comparison with the original level of achievement in the Pre-writing being the third highest increase (after Orthographic Control and Vocabulary Range respectively). However, the only criterion which showed a decrease was Grammatical Accuracy, which was an -8.4%, compared the Post-writing stage (with Instagram) against Pre-writing (with Instagram). On the other hand, During the Pre-writing stage, none of the criteria exceeded 80% of achievement, being 75% the highest percentage (Orthographic Control and Creative Writing). The lowest percentage was 52,7%, which corresponded to Coherence. In this Pre-writing instance, there were no results below 50% of achievement in none of the criteria assessed. As to the Post-writing stage (with Instagram), four criteria surpassed 80% (Creative Writing, Vocabulary Range, Orthographic Control and Number of Words) being Orthographic Control the one with the highest level of achievement (100%). On the contrary, there were two criteria below 70% (Grammatical Accuracy and Coherence), being Grammatical Accuracy the one with the lowest level (52,7%), 8,4% under the percentage obtained in the same criterion in Pre-writing (without Instagram).

Table 1: Students´ level of development in the writing tasks per criterion

Criteria	Students´ score. Pre writing (Without the use of Instagram)	Students´ level of development. Pre writing (Without the use of Instagram)	Students´ score. Post writing (With the use of Instagram)	Students´ level of development. Post writing (With the use of Instagram)
Creative writing	27	75%	31	86,1%
Vocabulary range	24	66,6%	32	88,8%
Grammatical accuracy	22	61,1%	19	52,7%
Coherence	19	52,7%	20	55,5%

Orthographic control	27	75%	36	100%
Number of words	24	66,6%	33	91,6%

4.2 Students´ global performance analysis in the writing skill

In the Pre-writing stage (without Instagram) the global level of students´ achievement reached 67% and in the Post-writing stage (with Instagram), the level was 79% (Table 2). When contrasting both stages, it was noticed an improvement in their writing development of 12% from the first instance to the last one. As it has been shown (Table 1), the criteria that influenced the most in the low level of performance at the beginning of the intervention were Grammatical Accuracy and Coherence (61,1 and 52,7% respectively). In the case of Post-writing (with Instagram), as it is appreciated (Table 1), the criterion that contributed the most to improving the results in the second instance was Orthographic Control. Although the percentage of improvement in Grammatical Accuracy during the Post-writing (with Instagram) stage was lower than in the first one (Pre-writing) (Table 1), it did not cause a substantial decrease in the global level of achievement as the rest of the criteria were above the results from the first instance during the intervention.

Table 2: Student´s global performance analysis with and without Instagram in the writing skill

	Students´ global level of written development. Pre-writing (Without the use of Instagram)	Students´ global level of written development. Post-writing (With the use of Instagram)
Student 1	87,5%	87,5%
Student 2	66,6%	87,5%
Student 3	75%	79,1%
Student 4	83,3%	79,1%
Student 5	70,8%	79,1%
Student 6	62,5%	91,6%
Student 7	62,5%	66,6%
Student 8	45,8%	66,6%
Student 9	45,8%	70,8%
Total	**67%**	**79%**

4.3 Participant´s perceptions of writing stories through the use of Instagram

Under the dimension General view about the strategy, Table 3 shows how the responses given by the participants were divided into **themes, frequency and samples**.

In the case of themes, the most relevant and repeated topics mentioned by the participants were included under the same heading. These were: Difficulty for using Instagram and Easiness to use Instagram. The frequency represented the number of times that the students´ comments appeared in the transcript. Finally, the samples represented the type of extracts (quotations) that were detected in the transcript, which exemplified the relevant topics considered under this thematic analysis.

Table 3: General view about Instagram

Dimension One	Frequency	Sample
Difficulty for using Instagram	4	P1: "Sir pero escribir en Instagram no lo veo como tan sencillo de sar". P2: "Ahh pero cuando estás empezando a ocuparlo no es tan fácil". P3: "Sí porque uno pasa a apretar como dos teclas". P4: "Ahh si cuando ya sabe sí".
Easiness for using Instagram	4	P1: "Súper fácil". P2: "Muy fácil". P3: "No lo encuentro difícil". P4: "Súper fácil".

Of all the answers that the students provided in the Focus Group interview, the most noticeable aspect is related to the general view they had about the strategy. Table 3 shows what it is considered the first dimension where participants expressed how easy or difficult it was using Instagram. Regarding the number of repetitions of students´ opinions that appeared in the interview, the theme that emerged the most is the one that referred to easiness to use Instagram**.** Under this category four student expressed in different ways that they considered Instagram a resource easy to use. On the other hand, an equal number of participants expressed that the tool "was not so easy to use", "it is hard to use" and "it is easy when you have experience". Here, there was no distinction on using the tool with cell phones or through the computers. Both, negative answers as well as positive ones did not consider any specific platform. On the contrary, the answers were generalized in this respect.

4.4 Participant´s perceptions of writing stories through the use of corrective feedback
Under the dimension Perception of the strategy in terms of writing enhancement, Table 4 shows how responses given by the participants were divided by **themes, frequency and samples.** In the case of themes, the most relevant and repeated topics provided by participants were included under the same heading. These were: Instagram and socio

pragmatic awareness do not help in improving writing and Instagram and then feedback does not help in improving my writing. The frequency represented the number of times the comments appeared in the transcript. Finally, the sample represented the type of comments (quotations) that were detected in the transcript, which exemplify the relevant topics considered under analysis. Under this dimension the questions "**Do you think that Instagram made any changes in the way that you write?**" and **"Did you try to write better during the Instagram session because there were more classmates observing what you wrote?"** all of the participants admitted that neither Instagram or its socio pragmatic awareness provoked any changes in the way they wrote. Besides, they expressed without any exceptions that Instagram had not provided any kind of help for improving their writing. On the contrary, the tool may have caused confusion when they wrote their stories by transforming the words with the self-correcting tool provided in Instagram, changing completely the concept they had originally written and thus the meaning of the idea they wanted to express.

On the other hand, the question "**Do you think that the use of corrective feedback provided after the first story** and then the one provided in the second writing task done with Instagram will make any changes?" also caused a series of negative answers. Here, despite there were few comments about the help of corrective feedback, the most of the students stated that Instagram did not change the way they wrote their stories (five comments), explaining that they were going to keep on writing the same way they were used to.

Table 4: Perception of the strategy in terms of writing enhancement

Thematic Analysis	Frequency	Sample
Instagram and socio pragmatic awareness do not help in improving writing	7	P1: "Sir sería lo mismo porque…". P2: "Da lo mismo". P3: "Sir, lo único que sé es que Instagram no me ayudó a escribir bien". P4: "Con el corrector de palabras es peor" P5:" No, escribir en cualquier parte no te va a hacer mejor o peor". P6: "Es lo mismo porque uno piensa igual". P7:"No importa si hay más personas viendo lo que escribo".

Instagram and feedback do not help improving writing	5	P1: "Escribo como siempre". P2: "Sería lo mismo Sir". P3:"Ayudó el feedback". P4: "No [estás más consciente de tu ortografía]" P5: "Oh…pocas veces "

5. Discussion

Prior to the beginning of the intervention, and based on ´ sociopragmatic awareness theory (Prichard 2013; Blattner and Lomicka 2012), it was expected that all of the criteria under observation (Creative Writing, Vocabulary Range, Grammatical Accuracy, Coherence, Orthographic Control and Number of Words) would be highly developed in students' writing as they would be more aware of the mechanisms they were expected to use. The participants were provided with corrective feedback for each story they wrote, a practice which typically improves learners' vocabulary control and range (Laufer, 1994; Lee, 2003). Moreover, with the use of corrective feedback it was expected an improvement of Grammatical Accuracy and Coherence as they were the two criteria that the teacher highlighted the most at the moment of correcting any mistake the participants had made in the previous short stories. However, the findings showed that despite the use of corrective feedback, these were the two criteria that finally showed a lower level of improvement.

When the written texts were evaluated with the adapted analytic rubric, the data stated that overall there was a 12% of improvement in the participants´ performance in the writing of short stories. That means they improved from 67% of the global level of written achievement in the Pre-writing (without Instagram) to a 79% in the Post-writing (with Instagram). This improvement was an average percentage obtained from all of the criteria assessed in the rubric (Creative Writing, Vocabulary Range, Grammatical Accuracy, Coherence, Orthographic Control and Number of Words). This may corroborate what authors like Prichard (2013) and Blattner and Lomicka (2012) propose about the benefits of using Social Networks for language learning.

On the other hand, the findings from the Focus Group interview indicated that in general terms students´ answers showed a negative attitude towards the use of Instagram as a tool for improving their writing. The most repeated themes provided by the interviewed students revealed that Instagram and socio pragmatic awareness did not help in improving writing short stories and feedback did not help in improving their writing. As it was appreciated in the interview, some questions like "*Do you think that the use of corrective feedback and then the continuation with Instagram will make any*

changes?", the participants provided a series of mixed answers. On one hand, whereas they expressed that they felt the use of corrective feedback had helped them, they disregarded the benefits of Instagram (or the socio pragmatic awareness). Each learner felt that their writing ability had not improved compared to their previous writings merely because of the use of Instagram. They stated that Instagram would not change the way they wrote, explaining that they were going to write the same way they did. Here, they expressed without any exceptions that Instagram did not provide any kind of help for improving their writing. Moreover, despite specifying that they found this environment motivating, some learners showed distraction in the activity. This negative attitude was found to derive from individual personalities, learning styles and confidence levels rather than the features of Instagram (Prichard, 2013).

Regarding the six criteria from the Common European Framework of References rubric, although there was an improvement in the students´ performance in five out of the six criteria (Creative Writing, Vocabulary Range, Coherence, Orthographic Control and Number of Words), it cannot be precise if this improvement was due to the effect of the socio pragmatic awareness competence students developed or if it was due to the corrective feedback provided by the teacher every time they wrote their stories, or if it was caused by any other variable not detected in the study. In that sense, it can be inferred that in general Instagram did not represent entirely an improvement for the learners merely because they worked in a technological environment.

6. Conclusion

Although Social Networks (SNs), particularly Instagram´s key features appear to encourage descriptive writing (Phillips, 2013), there is no evidence of its implementation in Chilean ´s EFL classes, where in many cases the acquisition of a second language is through naturally occurring social interactions with others or the formal delivery and reception of knowledge (Ellis, 2008). Social Networks and their use in EFL classrooms or in the second language classroom, particularly in the junior level, is a field that requires much more research as the results from the data gathering tools that emerged in this study were rather contradictory.

Taking the aforementioned findings into consideration, we consider that this study serves as a starting point for conducting further research regarding the usefulness of implementing Social Network activity based projects in EFL classes. This, considering the findings from the Focus Group Interview contradicting the existence of the socio pragmatic awareness skill when developing collaborative work with a social

media resource proposed by authors like Prichard (2013) and Blattner and Lomicka (2012).

Hence, in first place since in the current study there were not conclusive findings on which a specific concrete factor (socio pragmatic awareness, corrective feedback or any other that was not detected) could explain students´ development in the writing of short stories through the use of Instagram. For this reason, it is recommended to conduct separated studies in order to corroborate which of the factors under study is effectively the one that supports the writing development among the participants. In second place and in the light of the information, it is also recommended to conduct a higher number of sessions as a way of obtaining concrete data about the real factors that influence the development of the writing of short stories.

On the other hand, it may be advisable to carry out a research by using control groups. This means one group working with the Instagram as a pedagogical tool to support the writing of short stories and another group required to write pen and paper short stories without using Instagram. In the same way, another research could work with one group of students receiving corrective feedback during their writing assignment and another group without receiving any feedback.

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