

## **A Sentence a Day – How to Engage University Students in an Online Daily Writing Task**

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### **Introduction**

This report describes a case study of the use of a social network to engage university students taking English as a foreign language (EFL) in an online, sentence-a-day writing task. The classes were taught at the Federal University of the ABC Region (UFABC), which offers no degrees in languages or literature. Since no language classes are offered as part of an undergraduate degree<sup>1</sup>, professors from various academic programs<sup>2</sup> and trained administrative staff teach extracurricular EFL classes.

Officially, students are expected to have a minimum level of comprehension of written English before entering the university, but the 10-hour-long entrance exam has only a few questions to test written English comprehension. Formally, they are not expected to know any more English by the time they graduate but, in practice, some professors assign English texts as required reading, even though courses are taught in Portuguese. Students with better English skills have greater access to educational resources, research and company internships, and study-abroad programs. The better-prepared freshmen have intermediate or above English language skills, but many of the low-income students have very little English knowledge and no funds to take classes outside the university. The university charges no tuition and low-income students receive scholarships to partially cover living expenses, but the amount is small. UFABC offers these free EFL courses to improve students' chances of success, and low-income students have priority.

The author began teaching pre-intermediate English (A2-level), focusing on the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), in the first quarter of 2016. The students had very weak writing skills and were reluctant to do writing assignments. The English courses described in this case study, each lasting 60 hours, were taught during the second (Q2) and third (Q3) quarters, with three-hour classes twice weekly. The first course was a continuation of Pre-intermediate (A2) English. The second course was an Intermediate English (B1) for an Academic Environment course. There were 14 students in the second quarter course and 10 students in the third quarter course. Six students attended both courses.

Students had no formal opportunity to communicate in English outside of class, and I presumed that many students would only produce English (writing and speaking) on class days. Could I convince them to produce written English every day? In 1960, English professor Robert Hume described a sentence-a-day in-class activity: "It demands initially of each student that he produce *one well-written and meaningful sentence*, out of his own thought and observation, for every class day in the semester. (...) After about two weeks I warn the students that I shall expect them soon to develop one of their own sentences into a well-fashioned paragraph" (91). Another professor who employed this method argued that one sentence per student is also a reasonable amount for a professor to grade:

Each pupil-interested teacher surely can read or hear with compassionate thoroughness *one* extemporaneously prepared sentence from *each* student *every* day. Such a one-sentence-a-day plan can support an individually-gearred instructional program in an English course for the entire term (Benton 717).

Additionally, students may find that shorter writing assignments provide a manageable amount of feedback to process. Benton notes that, with writing, "there is opportunity for even the most shy class member to convey his thoughts to the teacher. No monopoly by one or two exists in such a class situation" (718). Shy students might otherwise stay silent and produce nothing (spoken or written). However, both instructors describe methods of the professor-to-individual-student variety. Current teaching approaches recommend increased peer-to-peer interactions and favor student-centered rather than instructor-centered learning spaces. In this new environment, social networks lend themselves to repurposing for the implementation of an updated, peer-to-peer version of the sentence-a-day writing activity.

The use of Web 2.0 tools to encourage writing or speaking in a foreign language has been discussed by multiple authors in recent years (Nishioka; Warschauer and Liaw; Son; Warschauer and Kern; Hattem; Wang

and Vásquez). Nishioka describes a university environment in which Korean students of Japanese were encouraged to practice Japanese with other learners through videoconferencing (some writing, but principally speaking) (131). Warschauer and Liaw discuss instructional uses of online multiuser virtual environments—like Second Life and multiplayer games—in which users interact by writing or speaking (113–15). Hattem describes a pilot program using Twitter, and thus writing (38). The article by Wang and Vásquez reviews research on how Web 2.0 technologies are used for language learning, including social networks and virtual worlds, in which users mostly write, but may choose to speak (416–17).

According to Gee and Hayes, texts written in social networks demonstrate the properties of both oral and written language:

Digital media are an interesting hybrid of the properties of oral language and of written language. [. . .]

When digital media carry language, language can be interactive, for example in a chat room, via text messaging, or on a Twitter feed, but also permanent. [. . .] We will argue that digital media "power up" or enhance the powers of language, oral and written, just as written language "powered up" or enhanced the powers of oral language.

Readers may say that digital media carry so much more than language. But language itself is and has always been a mixture of sound, words, images created in the mind, and gestures used in contexts full of objects, sounds, actions, and interactions. Language has always been "multimodal" (combining words, images, and sounds) as are many messages conveyed via digital media and, indeed, many other media today. (1)

A social network online would thus be a convenient way to increase students' production skills for both oral and written output. We can question whether breaking production into writing and speaking is, to some extent, a linguistic convenience. Gee and Hayes assert that language is used for two purposes, simultaneously: 1) for communicating information and 2) for social connection. There are two continua: when communicating information, either the information itself or the social interaction can be the focus; with respect to communication for social connection, the interaction can be for social bonding (informal), or for distancing (formal, for example from an authority figure). Speakers pay attention to both continua when speaking, based on the listener (23–24). Practicing English in a social network environment with peers and an authority figure can help students learn to navigate the mores governing certain types of social interactions.

However, language teaching colleagues who created class WhatsApp or Facebook groups had mentioned that students do not tend to write much in the target language. Many students with weak writing skills use emoticons, write using text-message abbreviations, or write in their native language. Already aware of the Lang-8<sup>3</sup> language-learning community, in which users write in the language they are learning and correct the writing in their native language of other users, I thought to use this social network with my classes, as described by Bundgens-Kosten (99). The system works via a chain of reciprocal feedback, with an English speaker earning points for correcting a Japanese speaker, who earns points for correcting a German speaker, who earns points for correcting a Portuguese speaker, etc. Users are encouraged to make friends, and they see the posts of these friends, waiting for correction, on their home pages.

Before trying Lang-8 with a class, I tried it myself under the conditions I intended to impose on my students. I committed to writing a sentence in Hungarian every day for a month, as I was then taking a beginning Hungarian class (A1-level). I felt that my Hungarian skills, especially vocabulary, increased much faster than if I had just completed the homework assigned by my teacher, and the vocabulary learned was more relevant to my interests. The most challenging thing, however, was deciding what to write. Hume (91) asked students to write about anything on their mind, and allotted 5 minutes to the task. Benton (717) had her students construct sentences to employ certain grammatical structures. Given my limited knowledge of Hungarian grammar and vocabulary, finding something I could write about was an obstacle. It did not seem that either Benton or Hume's topic prompts would work, in isolation, with students with A2-level language skills. Before using Lang-8 with a class, I would have to develop appropriate writing prompts, ideally on subjects of interest to the students. A second problem with Lang-8 also became apparent during the month-long experiment. Due to the way the interface is designed, focusing on correction rather than interaction, there were very few written conversations. Users neither responded to questions in my texts, nor interacted except to correct my mistakes. This was not very stimulating.

Soon after, I taught a three-week course to faculty colleagues on Academic Communication in English, and decided to incorporate writing assignments on Lang-8. My colleagues and I became friends on the site so I could correct their posts if no one else did, and they were asked to post information about their research and teaching experiences. These are precisely the types of texts they needed to write frequently. I anticipated that they would be enthusiastic about the possibility of interacting with native English speakers, but they were not. They wanted immediate corrections from me (an instructor, and a native speaker), not a tool that would provide them with free corrections whenever they needed them in the future. They also were not interested in correcting the texts of Lang-8 users learning Portuguese, to earn points which would lead to other users correcting their English. I had to correct many of their Lang-8 texts myself, and was disappointed by the outcome of the experiment.

It appeared that Lang-8 would not work in my context, and I decided to set up my own social network on a private site. I invited my students to respond to daily prompts, and to interact among themselves on the site. They were the only users, and I was the only native speaker providing corrections. The pedagogical objectives of the new activity were 1) to extend class time via interaction on a social network, ideally on a daily basis; 2) to improve students' grammatical, discursive and strategic competences (Shumin 206–08), which are believed to improve speaking skills; 3) to engage students through the use of language and vocabulary relevant for authentic communication with peers; and 4) to provide content-centered and form-centered correction of student writing.

The system also needed to allow the instructor 1) to track student completion of the sentence-a-day assignment; 2) to attach a grade to daily practice; and 3) to spend a limited amount of time each day posting prompts and interacting with students via the site (15 minutes was typical). Transferring prompt-writing to students reduced professor work while increasing peer-to-peer communication and student engagement.

This study is a record of the use of the social network implemented to engage students in a daily English writing activity through authentic communication with peers and an instructor. According to Wang and Vásquez (412), most studies to date have focused on other Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs and wikis. Few have examined student engagement and progress in a quantitative manner. An exception, (Hattem), describes a similar experiment using Twitter from the students' viewpoint, based on a survey of student attitudes.

## Methodology

After the Lang-8 experiments described above, I set up a social network on a private domain using the open source Joomla! framework and an extension called EasySocial<sup>4</sup>. It can be accessed via any Internet Browser, with a special interface optimized for mobile phone screens. Beginning in the second quarter of 2016, posting in the social network accounted for 15% of students' final grade in the English course. A prompt was provided every day, including weekends and holidays. I participated almost every day by either posting a prompt or by responding to prompts posted by students.

The EasySocial network is similar to FaceBook. A user can create a post with text, images, links or a poll, and can comment on posts. A person can be tagged in a post by a friend by using @username when typing. Users receive notifications of comments and/or comments in which they are tagged via email by default, but can change their profile configuration to eliminate notifications<sup>5</sup>. Most students uploaded profile pictures and background photos to personalize their profiles, thus treating the social network as more than just an obligation.

WhatsApp was not adopted for the reasons mentioned above, and Twitter, used by (Hattem) was originally considered, but its character limitations might have led to poor English grammar and spelling, and limited production. Additionally, a quick poll of students during the first quarter of 2016 indicated that none of them had a Twitter account. A closed group in FaceBook would also have been an option, but data collection would have been much more difficult. Using EasySocial, I had access to all information, including the exact day and time, the type of post, which thread (sequence of posts) it was in, etc. Another disadvantage of using FaceBook would be its power to distract students from their studies, given all the other activity on the site.

## Frequency of Posting and Words Posted

Data on the number of days each student posted, the number of words in each post, the total number of words posted, and the total number of posts is shown in Table 1 for 2Q 2016 and in Table 2 for 3Q 2016. The

students common to both courses are marked with a grey background. The total number of days on which students were expected to post were 64 for 2Q 2016 and 72 for 3Q 2016. The posting frequencies are normalized in the third columns of Tables 1 and 2 to facilitate comparison. For the first course, posting frequency ranged from 66% to 6%, whereas in the second course posting frequency ranged from 71% to 11%. During the first course, students were encouraged to participate, but no feedback was given on their progress (e.g. likely grade for the activity). During the second course, a greater attempt was made to schedule posts by specific students for certain days, such as three students signing up to post a poem each day for 4 days. Students were reminded to post if they did not comply with the schedule.

When completing traditional writing exercises, students usually turned in texts of about 200-300 words. Most students in both courses wrote far more than this in our social network, and did the traditional writing assignments too. Of the six students who took both courses, only two had fewer posts in the second course. However, all six increased the number of words posted, by a factor of 1.87 on average.

My original fear was that students would respond to writing prompts with short, one- or two-word responses. They were asked to write sentences of at least five words. The results show that they were sufficiently engaged by the conversations to post an average of 20 words/post in Q2 2016 and 27 words/post in Q3 2016.

Table 1. Statistical results per student - 2Q 2016

Student	No. Days (Total 64)	% Days Posted	Ave. Words/ Post	Total Words Posted	Total No. Posts
632	42	66	22.6	1924	85
630	34	53	21.4	1433	67
631	32	50	18.4	1138	62
635	25	39	17.2	1189	69
633	25	39	18.8	1015	54
625	24	38	17.8	994	56
624	18	28	22.5	810	36
634	16	25	20.6	639	31
629	15	23	19.5	741	38
626	15	23	21.6	757	35
636	10	16	15.8	647	41
637	8	13	15.8	205	13
628	7	11	30.7	368	12
627	4	6	17.7	265	15

Table 2. Statistical results per student - 3Q 2016

Student	No. Days (Total 72)	% Days Posted	Ave. Words/ Post	Total Words Posted	Total No. Posts
690	51	71	28.9	4746	164
630	42	58	24.4	3190	131
703	36	50	34.5	4654	135
634	31	43	22.4	1839	82
694	28	39	28.3	2322	82
624	23	32	28.8	1471	51
625	23	32	24.3	1266	52
635	18	25	25.2	1736	69
627	11	15	27.8	417	15
704	8	11	26.0	729	28

One of the objectives of this activity was to convince students to write every day of the week, not just the night before class or the night before an assignment was due. Figures 1 (for 2Q 2016) and 2 (for 3Q 2016) show that, for the most part, this objective was met. In both quarters, Sunday was the most popular day for posting, while Wednesday was one of the least favorites. This may be because students often had other English homework assigned on Tuesday and due on Thursday.

Figure 1. Days of week on which 2Q 2016 students posted

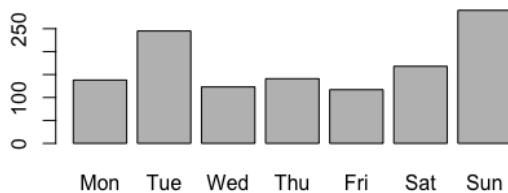
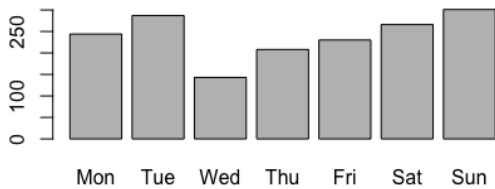


Figure 2. Days of week on which 3Q 2016 students posted



## Results for Different Types of Prompts

During the first quarter using EasySocial (Q2 2016), I began by asking questions taken from the textbook used in the class (Latham-Koenig et al.). After a week, I taught the students the game "Two truths and one lie", in which students took turns posting a daily poll with three statements, one of which was a lie, then answered questions posed by other students regarding the statements. Students then voted on which statement they thought was the lie. After all students had completed the two truths activity, I held a cartoon caption contest like the one in *The New Yorker Magazine*<sup>6</sup>, for one week. I then returned to mostly random questions, some taken from the textbook, until the end of the quarter. I also introduced the "20 questions" game, in which I posted a question and the students had to ask me yes/no questions in order to guess the answer. Regardless of the type of question or activity, variety helps prevent boredom.

The question prompts were popular, and resulted in the highest number of words per post in responses. They included questions about daily life, solicited students' opinions on many topics, and addressed cultural differences. Sometimes a photo, a comic strip, or a link to a video were included with the prompt. The number of posts per day can be seen in Figure 3 for Q2 2016. Many students posted more than once on some days, responding to questions from previous days' prompts. An example of a question prompt and the resulting thread is shown in Extract 1. The pattern is basically Initiation-Response-(Feedback). In this extract, interaction is professor-to-student, with no peer-to-peer communication, but this depended on the question, and on who initiated the thread.

Extract 1 – Question posed to elicit use of phrasal verbs and clothing vocabulary<sup>7</sup>

Professor: Thursday: What articles of clothing/jewelry do you take off first when you get home in the afternoon/evening?

Student1: I use to take my shoes off, I do not like to wear them for a long time

Professor: @student1: You should say "I usually take my shoes off". You are converting "used to," for things you used to do but no longer do, into "use to" for the present, but it does not work that way. In the present, "use" is for "utilizar". :)

Student2: I take off my shoes outside and put my havaianas' flip-flop.

Student3: I take off first my watch, my earrings, my coat and shoes.

Student4: First, I take off my watch, then my shoes and, finally, I change to a more comfortable clothes to stay in home.

Professor: @student2, the opposite of "take off" is "put on". It is also a phrasal verb!

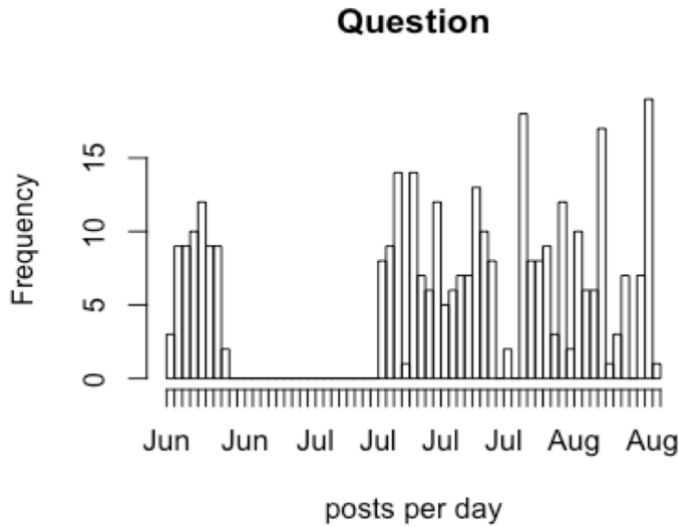
Student5: If I'm wearing a coat, I take it off. If not, I take off my shoes.

Student6: I always take off my shoes firstly.

Student7: I take off my shoes before I walk into my house

Student8: I take off my shoes to relax

Figure 3. Q2 2016 Question prompts - posts/day



The two-truths game was initially popular, but the schedule had only one student posting a poll with three statements each day, and by the time all students had posted their statements many of the earlier threads had scrolled off the screen and been forgotten. Figure 4 shows the declining interest in this game. Perhaps having two or three students post their statements every day would make the game more engaging. An example of a two-truths poll and the resulting thread is shown in Extract 2. This game can be used to practice forming questions, which the class was studying at the time. Interaction is mostly peer-to-peer, with some instructor feedback.

#### Extract 2 – Two-truths-and-one-lie post and peer interaction

Student 1: Two truths and one lie:

- 1) I have two sisters.
- 2) I always lived in Santa Catarina.
- 3) My grandmother was Spanish.

Professor: @Student1, you cannot have "always" lived in Santa Catarina, because you do not now... Do you mean until you moved to São Paulo state?

Student2: What is the name and ages of your sisters?

Student1: @student2, their names are Fernanda e Camila. Fernanda is 31 and Camila is 28 years old.

Student1: @Professor, Yes. I lived in Santa Catarina and I moved to São Paulo.

Student3: How old were you when you moved to São Paulo?

Student4: How was your grandmother's name?

Student5: What is grandmother yours Spanish? Grandmother by your mother's side or father's side?

Student6: Do you speak Spanish?

Student1: @student3, I moved to Ourinhos SP when I was 5 years old.

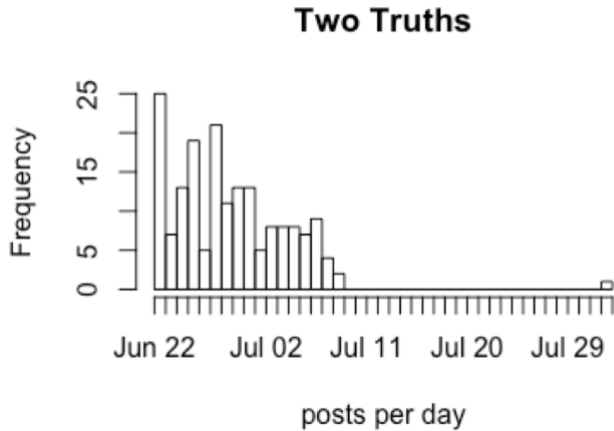
Student1: @student4 e @student5, my grandmother Spanish is my mother's mother. Her name is Aparecida.

Student1: @student6, I do not know Spanish because my grandmother came to Brazil when she was a child e she died 12 years before I born.

Student:7 Are your sisters younger than you?

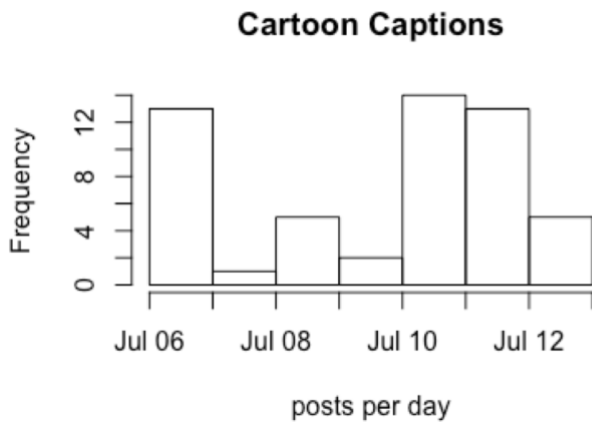
Student1: @student7, Yes. I am younger than they.

Figure 4. Two truths - posts/day



Inspired by The New Yorker Magazine cartoon caption contest, a cartoon without a caption was posted each day for a week and students were asked to post captions. The resulting post pattern is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Cartoon captions - posts/day



This task frustrated some students who stated that they could think of captions, but did not have the language skills to express them. I used the same cartoons for a competition in an advanced (C1) level course taught later, and the advanced students invented more complex captions. An example of a cartoon prompt and the resulting thread is shown in Extract 3. Interaction is professor-to-student, with no peer-to-peer communication.

Extract 3 – Cartoon caption thread:

Professor: So, what is your best caption for this comic? You can submit more than one! [Cartoon showing a mouse pointing a gun at a cat]

Student1: Come on! You have 30 seconds to explain where is my cheese, 29...28...

Professor: Wait... I can explain!

Professor: You do realize that you don't have a thumb, right?

Student2: I swear I was not going to eat you. I was giving you a tongue bath!



Student3: I did not eat your friend, I swear!

Student4: why do not you believe I am a vegetarian cat ?

Student5: Hey, bro! Relax! I don't have any cheese with me!

Student6: What's the matter with you? Were not you having fun too?

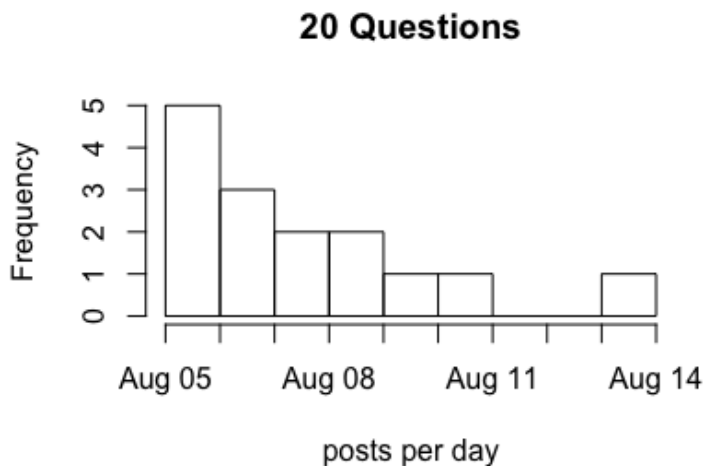
Student7: Stay calm, here, my wallet and some cheese!

Student8: Come on! Could we be friends, no? Just drop this weapon for we can talk better...

Student9: So I pointed the gun and shout at him: DISARM THE MOUSETRAP! You should have seen his face!!

The "20 Questions" activity was not successful, and was used as a prompt on only a single day. I asked students to guess what my favorite vegetable was, but the responses trickled in over several days (see Figure 6), with some students asking the same or similar questions because they did not read previous questions and answers in the same thread. The main problem was the asynchronous nature of the interactions. I normally posted prompts before noon, whereas the students tended to post in the evening up until past midnight, when I am not awake. For this type of activity to be successful, the people asking and answering the questions need to be online during the same time frame.

Figure 6. 20 questions - posts/day



## Discourse types

Our private social network was an extension of the classroom into a virtual space in which the students had more control over the flow of (written) conversation and turn-taking, and could more freely express themselves and their interests. Of the four classroom discourse modes defined by Walsh (65–68)—managerial mode, classroom context mode, skills and systems mode, and materials mode—most online interactions were written, asynchronous versions of the classroom context mode. This is evidenced by the predominant interactional features: minimal repair, clarification requests, content feedback, and extended learner turns. Some prompts, especially those containing a link to a video or webpage, resulted in discourse more similar to the materials mode, with a mix of display and open questions.

The Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern was affected by the asynchronous nature of communication. Either the instructor or a student would start a thread, and then other students would respond. Normally, many students would respond before the instructor returned to the site to comment on prior posts in the thread, converting what had begun as an IRF pattern into conversational interactions. Instructor posts were often mini-prompts, asking students follow-up questions to encourage them to post more words, or responses similar to those expected from students, rather than corrections. Extract 3, above, contains an example of the professor modeling possible student responses.

## Correction

Concern about stifling students' interest in participating in the social network led me to the decision to correct only those errors directly related to the material being covered in class, or issues that were problematic for multiple students. In the beginning, no corrections were made in the social network. I gathered the errors from the first few weeks and created a PowerPoint presentation for in-class feedback. However, both preparing the presentation and in-class error correction were extremely time consuming, with the latter reducing time available for regular class. I then began posting limited corrections, tagging the student in the comment to call his or her attention to the post. I did not try to correct everything that was wrong, just mistakes related to grammar and vocabulary that they were expected to know at their level, or those repeated by other students in the class. Corrections were both content-centered and form-centered for all prompt types. In some cases, I explained a grammar rule explicitly, or identified a word as being of a certain type (see two examples in extract 1). In other cases, I rephrased what a student had written, including the corrections in uppercase letters, as seen in Extract 4.

Extract 4 – sample correction

Student1: They live in a site<sup>8</sup> so there is a lot of space to the animals.

Professor: @student1, they live on a SMALL FARM?

In yet other cases, I asked for clarification, as in Extract 2, to allow the student to self-correct.

Through conversations with students about their errors, I found that they did not always look at the corrections of regular graded writing assignments, done using Microsoft Word's track changes feature and returned to students via the university's online system. However, they often acknowledged corrections in the social network by posting thanks or a comment. An added benefit is that other students, who often made the same errors, could see the corrections too.

Grading of this activity was based on participation, not the correctness of the language produced. It was not intended to be an assessment-driven environment, but rather a continuation of the classroom context discourse, most of which goes uncorrected in the classroom. Students were told that participation in the forum was 15% of their total grade in the course, and I evaluated them based on the total number of words posted during the quarter. The objective was to imitate classroom interactions as much as possible, with light correction of a few students, especially when the same mistake was repeated by multiple students. After using the social network activity for two quarters, I analyzed the data and wrote an algorithm to calculate the number of days on which each student had written during a given period. In 2017, grading was changed to one point per day, with the percentage of days on which students posted converted into 15% of their final grade. This grading method better reflects the goal of the exercise, to write a sentence every day. Students are now posting much less sporadically.

## Conclusions

Results show that a daily assignment of posting to a social network can successfully engage students enough that most of them will write often (on more than 25% of days in the quarter) on days spread throughout the week. The social-network format is flexible, and adaptable to many different types of activities. The data described above show that different types of activities have different success rates, and lead to different discourse modes.

In terms of time spent, 15 minutes a day interacting with students online was more enjoyable than assigning weekly writing assignments and then spending hours correcting them, knowing that many students never even look at the feedback, just the grade. I continue to use the social network, with different types of prompts and activities.

## Next Steps

The presence of multimedia (videos, links, and images) probably also affects response rates, but their influence could not be addressed here. In later quarters, students frequently posted spontaneously, and it would be interesting to see if student responses to peer prompts are different in some way from responses to instructor prompts.

Some authors (Takagaki 47) argue that writing practice can improve speaking accuracy and willingness to speak in class, although I have no data to provide as evidence, as no classroom recordings were made. In this English as a foreign language context, our Brazilian students are more likely to interact with foreigners via written texts, than through oral communication. This could be through passionate affinity spaces, massive open online course (MOOC) forums, online video games or virtual worlds. Gee and Hayes coined the term passionate affinity space when describing the learning that takes place outside of traditional learning establishments:

A passionate affinity space, and the learning that goes on in it, requires some people associated with the space to have a deep passion for the common shared endeavor. It does not require everyone to have such a deep passion, but it does recognize the value of that passion and respect it, in some sense. (. . .) Passionate affinity-based learning occurs when people organize themselves in the real world and/or via the Internet (or a virtual world) to learn something connected to a shared endeavor, interest, or passion. (Gee and Hayes 69)

Since so much learning is taking place outside of the classroom, authority-student discourse in passionate affinity spaces, such as social networks, should be studied. Learning about the effect of participating in these spaces on a student's evolution as a foreign-language user would also contribute to their use in a teaching context. We could create affinity spaces tailored to the needs of language learners, and develop prompts and other engagement techniques.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 2007 with an interdisciplinary focus, all freshmen must choose between an interdisciplinary bachelor's degree in Science and Technology (BCT), or in Science and Humanities (BCH). The former focuses on math, science and engineering, while the latter concentrates on social sciences, including philosophy, economics, public policy, and international relations, but not language or literature. After completing a three-year interdisciplinary degree, students can opt to complete additional coursework in a more specific area, such as aerospace engineering, and earn a second bachelor's degree.

<sup>2</sup> I teach mathematics in the Center for Mathematics, Computer Science and Cognition

<sup>3</sup> [www.lang-8.com](http://www.lang-8.com)

<sup>4</sup> Sold by stackideas in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. See [stackideas.com/easysocial](http://stackideas.com/easysocial) for updated information.

<sup>5</sup> Unlike FaceBook, EasySocial does not send any notification when a post is made, only when someone comments. Thus, to ensure other users are informed of a post, the poster or someone else must comment on the post after it is submitted. The data described in this article was obtained before I discovered this. The following year, I commented on every new post as soon as I wrote it, and students responded more, and earlier in the day.

<sup>6</sup> [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com)

<sup>7</sup> The start of each line indicates if the professor or a student is writing. @name is the system's way of tagging a user in a post/comment, and the tagged user receives a special email alert. I have numbered students consecutively in each extract, and these numbers do not correspond to their user numbers.

<sup>8</sup> Site is a false cognate with the Portuguese word *sítio*, meaning small farm

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