Learning a Language with Web 2.0: Exploring the Use of Social Networking Features of Foreign Language Learning Websites

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of an online survey and a usability test performed on three foreign language learning websites that use Web 2.0 technology. The online survey was conducted to gain an understanding of how current users of language learning websites use them for learning and social purposes. The usability test was conducted to gain an understanding of how potential users would interact with three foreign language learning websites and explore the pedagogical and technical usability of these sites. It is hoped that the results of this exploratory study would provide an insight into how the goals and designs of these websites incorporating Web 2.0 tools fit with the goals and needs of current and potential language learners.

KEYWORDS

Web 2.0 Technology, Foreign Language Learning, Usability Testing, User-centered Design

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Web 2.0 has been discussed and analyzed with both trepidation and enthusiasm in the field of technology. Tim O'Reilly (2005), one of the authors of the term, describes Web 2.0 as a collaborative environment in which users have the opportunity to contribute to a growing knowledge base, assist in the development of web-based tools, and participate in online communities. Michael Gorman, former president of the American Library Association, decries the movement towards a user-controlled Internet as "a world in which everyone is an expert in a world devoid of expertise" (Gorman, Farkas, Shirkey, & Miedema, 2007, p. B4).

While there continue to be disagreements over the possible benefits and drawbacks of Web 2.0 technology, there is also a growing interest in how and whether Web 2.0 tools could be used for educational purposes. An aspect of Web 2.0, which has yet to be sufficiently researched and consequently the focus of this paper, is the use of online social networks for foreign language learning purposes. The ability of the individual users to collaborate, create, and share content with other users may prove especially useful for learning languages (Lomicka & Lord, 2009). Social networks have generally been used informally for noneducational social interaction purposes. Popular examples of these types of social networking websites include MySpace (http://www.myspace.com) and Facebook (http://www.facebook.com). These tools allow users to create their own online profiles and interact with other online users within their circle or "network." Whyville (http://www.whyville.net) is an example of a social network that was developed for educational purposes. A large pool of preteen users log on to the Whyville website to interact with other users, discuss books, movies and play educational games (Solomon & Schrum, 2007).

Examples of foreign language learning sites that use social networking features include Palabea (http://www.palabea.net), Live Mocha (http://www.livemocha.com), and Babbel (http:/www.babbel.com). The main purpose of these online communities is to share and learn new languages through social interaction. Although many language learning websites using Web 2.0 social networking features are less than a year old, many already boast a large and active population of users who regularly log in to interact and learn from each other. One of the features of these sites, and possibly the most intriguing for language learning, is the opportunity for users to interact directly with native speakers through the use of video, audio, or text-based chat. This interaction between language learners can also be defined as "eTandem" (http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/etandem/etindex-en.html) and allows users to learn a new language and teach their native languages by using a communication tool. For example, an English speaker who wishes to learn Spanish is able to search the social network for a Spanish speaker who wishes to learn English. During the online exchange of languages, the learner acts both as student and teacher. These language learning websites can provide the real-time, conversational aspect of learning a language that is sometimes only available when visiting or living in a foreign country.

While language learning websites using Web 2.0 technology may offer great promise for foreign language education, there is a lack of research on how users currently use these sites for collaborative learning and social interaction purposes. There is also a lack of research on the pedagogical and technical usability of these sites and how potential language learners could use these sites to enhance their own language learning abilities. Lomicka and Lord (2009) stated that research investigating second language acquisition through the use of Web 2.0 tools is only beginning to emerge, and research is lacking both from theoretical and empirical perspectives. The purpose of this paper is to explore three language learning websites that utilize Web 2.0 social networking features by means of a survey and a usability test to understand how current and potential users use the sites.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Web 2.0 and Language Learning

The Web 2.0 culture of increased online participation has been most commonly defined by its contrast with the concept of Web 1.0. In the first stage of the internet, or Web 1.0, users played the more passive role of a simple receiver of information. The traditional tools of Web 1.0 included email, chat rooms, and discussion boards (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). Web 1.0 users would read static content created by "experts" who had the technical ability to write and post content (Ebner, 2007). Web 1.0 is contrasted with Web 2.0 in which general users consume, create, and edit content while easily collaborating with other users (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). Web 2.0 tools provide users the opportunity to play a more active role of potential author, contributor, editor, or specialist.

Not only are users given more opportunities to participate at a richer level, the quality and even the survival of Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, wikis, social networks, and mashups, are largely dependent on the quality and consistency of the contributions of the users. Blogs are largely made up of user-created content, wikis allow multiple users to contribute to a growing knowledge base, and social networks allow users to develop online communities of shared interests. While these Web 2.0 tools have grown in popularity with general users, some discussions focus on the continued relevance of Web 1.0 tools in today's world (De Weber, Mechant, Veevaete, & Hauttekeete, 2007). Nevertheless, the emergence of Web 2.0 tools may not diminish the importance and usefulness of Web 1.0 tools for today's users.

Many educators are discovering how Web 2.0 tools, such as educational blogs, wikis, and podcasts, could provide students with opportunities for greater learner control, active construction of knowledge, and access to collaborative learning environments (Solomon & Schrum, 2007). Using Web 2.0 technologies in the classroom may give teachers another way of reaching the latest generation of learners who are already heavily immersed in the Web 2.0 world outside of the classroom (Downes, 2005). The Web 2.0 may provide necessary connections between the learning resources and students, as well as empower students to collaboratively develop educational knowledge and content (De Weber et al., 2007).

The Web 2.0 is beginning to play a role within the more formal learning environment of foreign language classrooms. The reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills and needs of language learners may require a specific type of pedagogical design of educational tools. Interactive, user-developed content within Web 2.0 tools may provide "real-world" listening and speaking skills not provided by static Web 1.0 learning tools. For example, a university-wide survey of multiple disciplines was conducted to evaluate the satisfaction of students with their course websites (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2006). The foreign language students had the lowest satisfaction with their traditional course website. One student gave a reason for the low scoring as "A Web site can't answer questions like 'How do you pronounce …?'" (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2006, p. 3). The course website was not meeting the language learners' need for feedback and interaction in a new language. Perhaps this desire for input and the associated need for access to aspects of the foreign culture may be addressed by a more collaborative environment provided by Web 2.0 tools.

Godwin-Jones (2005) cites specific examples of teachers using the Web 2.0 in the classroom to facilitate language learning; instant messaging tools are being incorporated for text-based interaction with native speakers and downloadable podcasts are being made available to students for listening skills and word recognition. Web-based gaming environments provide a space for students to assume an online identity and interact with others in the foreign language. Many of these tools are just in the initial stages of classroom integration, but foreign language teachers are beginning to find a use for Web 2.0 tools within the classroom (Godwin-Jones, 2005). Further research is needed on how to evaluate the use of these types of tools for language learning purposes.

Using Usability Testing Methods to Evaluate Learning Websites

Usability testing is a method of evaluation often used to test the general ease of use of software and websites for end users. Observing and recording how users interact with a website allows researchers to discover issues that help or hinder users' attempts to reach specific individual goals (Liu, Traphagan, Huh, Young, Gilok, & McGregor, 2008). Many researchers are discovering how some of the techniques used to determine how usable a site is for users could be also be used to determine how learnable an educational site is for learners (Melis & Weber, 2007). Out of this interest in usability, as it could apply to educational websites and software, has grown the definition of "pedagogical usability," as differentiated from "technical usability" (Melis & Weber). Technical usability is defined as the general usability of a tool for a user—how easily users can complete a task with the least number of obstacles. Pedagogical usability applies specifically to how learnable and usable the website is for learners. Noneducational websites and software are expected to help users complete tasks as quickly and efficiently as possible. Educational websites must also provide a way for learners to learn during the task, and the quickest route may not always be the best way for learners to learn the content. Providing users with an immediate solution to an obstacle may not be the preferred outcome when users must learn during the process (Melis & Weber). A website that is technically us-

able may not be pedagogically usable. However, both technical and pedagogical usability are important for language learning environments because the ease of use of a website may be just as important as the effectiveness of its learnability.

METHODOLOGY

The following two questions guided this study of foreign language learning websites that use Web 2.0 technologies:

1. How do current users of a foreign language learning website that employs Web 2.0 technologies use the site for learning and social purposes?

2. What technical and pedagogical issues arise when potential users participate in a usability test of three foreign language learning websites that employ Web 2.0 technologies?

The three websites chosen for this evaluation are Palabea (http://www.palabea.net), Live Mocha (http://www.livemocha.com), and Babbel (http://www.babbel.com). These websites provide opportunities for users to interact with other users in order to learn a new language. The sites were chosen out of the pool of language learning websites because of their inclusion of free Web 2.0 tools and collaborative learning opportunities. Language websites that require users to pay for tutoring were eliminated, as well as sites that did not contain some aspect of what is considered Web 2.0 technologies. All three websites contained some social networking tools and user-created content, as well as static, site-created content.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SELECTED WEBSITES

The Palabea website provides an "Online-Exchange" environment in which users have the opportunity to interact with other users in audio and video conferences (see Figure 1). Other types of materials are available for learning purposes, including video lessons and podcasts. "Virtual Classrooms" are also available for users to join and learn with other users in a virtual learning environment. The Palabea site also provides links to educational offline resources, including local language schools.

Figure 1
Palabea Homepage

The Babbel website provides users the opportunity to learn Spanish, French, English, Italian, and German (see Figure 2). Interactive multimedia content provides users multiple ways to learn a new language at their own pace. A social network environment is also available and allows users to learn from each other via web-based audio or video chat.

Figure 2
Babbel Homepage

The Live Mocha website combines self-paced lessons with a social learning environment to allow individual users to choose how they would prefer to learn a new language (see Figure 3). Users can track their progress through online courses and access other learners directly from their profile pages.

Figure 3
Live Mocha Homepage

To address the two research questions above, we divided the evaluation into two phases. In phase I, we surveyed current users of one of the websites to find out how they used its Web 2.0 tools for learning and social purposes. In phase II, we conducted a usability test on potential users of the three websites to explore their experiences as they interacted with them. The purpose for studying both the activities of the current user population as well as potential learners' experience was to gain an insight into how these sites incorporating Web 2.0 tools are being used and could be used for learning and social purposes.

METHODOLOGY

Phase I: Analysis of Current Users' Use of a Website

This phase was conducted to evaluate how the current user population uses one language learning website, Babbel. An online survey was linked from the Babbel website seeking anonymous feedback from its users on their use of the site for language learning and social networking purposes (see survey in Appendix A). Questions focused on

1. the areas users visited most frequently,
2. how often they interacted with other users in a nonnative language, and
3. how their use of the site affected their day-to-day use of the language they were learning.

Phase II: Analysis of Potential User's Use of Three Websites

We conducted a usability test on how five potential users used the three language learning websites described above. This usability testing included tasks that the users were requested to complete. The tasks were developed to uncover both technical and pedagogical issues within the websites.

User Profiles for Phase II

Five students, who were language learners in a large public university in the southwest region of the United States, were recruited for this usability test. Two users were from Taiwan and three from the US. All users were between the ages of 28 and 40, and all had prior experience with learning a new language. Two of the users considered themselves to be multilingual, and most had some experience with learning multiple languages. Four out of the five participants had learned a language within a traditional, formal classroom environment. One user had also worked as a foreign language teacher. All participants were very comfortable using a computer and the web. None of the users was familiar with the sites to be tested.

Usability-Testing Tasks And Procedure

The usability tests were conducted in a usability lab reserved for this purpose at the university. Individual testing was conducted with each of the users. The lab consisted of a computer with a camera and Morae software installed on the computer to record the session. Each session took between 60 and 90 minutes, and the users were free to leave or end the session at any point during the test. Each user was provided an overall summary of the study and background of the sites. The users were asked a few pretest questions regarding their country of origin, languages spoken, and comfort level with technology. They were then asked to perform various tasks on the three websites while being observed by one of the researchers.

The tasks were developed using usability-testing methodology developed by Nielsen, Snyder, Molich, & Farrell (2000) and included exploratory tasks, specific tasks, and open-ended tasks. The testing also addressed pedagogical usability needs and included questions and tasks to help determine how well the users were able to use the website to learn specific educational content.

Exploratory task

The first task for each website required the users to spend a few minutes exploring the website before registering in a user profile. After a few minutes of exploration, they discussed what they thought the site was about, who it was built for, and their initial impressions on site's organization, design, and ease of use.

Closed-ended tasks

The second task required the users to log in with a test log in and access the internal pages of each site. They were asked to give their impression of the profile page and then to change elements in their profile. The third task required them to show how they would find another user within the social network in order to learn and practice a new language. They were not

required or expected to actually interact with other users within the network. Once they had successfully shown the researcher how and where they would find another user to speak with, the task was determined to be complete. The fourth task was developed to help determine the pedagogical usability of the site and required the users to use the site to find and learn the translation of a certain phrase in a second language. They were given the flexibility to determine what that phrase would be in order to make the task more relevant to the user's goals as a language learner.

Open-ended tasks

During the open-ended final task, the users were given the option of showing the researcher what areas of the site they would want to explore on another visit and to explain why. After the interaction with the websites, they discussed their reactions, what they had learned, and thoughts on whether the use of these tools would benefit their learning a new language. They were then asked to review each website briefly one more time and discuss which one they would be most likely to revisit and why they would go back to that particular one. They also discussed their general reactions and overall view of the sites and their content (see complete usability testing questions and task descriptions in Appendix B).

RESULTS

Phase I: Responses From the Current Users of a Website

The survey results of Phase I provided a glimpse of how current users used the Babbel site. The survey was linked from the Babbel homepage for 3 weeks, and 164 users completed the questionnaire. All of the voluntary participants indicated that they were willing to have the anonymous results of their surveys be part of this research, and all indicated they were over the age of 18 years old.

Descriptive analysis of the checkbox questions revealed the following results: (The percentages of respondents' answers totaled more than 100% because the respondents were allowed to select more than one response for a given question.)

Table 1
Users' Use of the Babbel Website

% of Users	Responses
54%	Had been using the Babbel website for less than one month
26%	Had been using the Babbel website for 1-3 months
44%	Had first found about Babbel from a search engine
31%	Spoke English as their first language
31%	Spoke German as their first language
35%	Used Babbel to learn Spanish
33%	Used Babbel to learn French
70%	Learning a new language for "fun"
37%	Learning a new language for "travel"
68%	Not taking a formal language class at this time
85%	Major goal for coming to Babbel was for "learning new vocabulary."

Table 2
Users' Impressions About the Babbel Website

% of Users	Responses
88%	Indicated that "Vocab Training" section of the site was the most helpful for meeting their goals as language learners
47%	Indicated that the "Discussion Board" section of the site was NOT helpful for meeting their goals as language learners
42%	Indicated that the "People (chat)" section of the site was NOT helpful for meeting their goals as language learners
29%	"Mostly spoke in a foreign language" when interacting with other users in the online chat
23%	"Mostly spoke in their native language" when interacting with other users in the online chat
35%	"Mostly chat with others who speak the foreign language" they wish to learn
33%	"Always chat with others who speak the foreign language" they wish to learn.
58%	After using Babbel, users indicated they "use new vocabulary more frequently"
37%	After using Babbel, users indicated "have more confidence in ability to speak the foreign language"

Responses to the open-ended questions revealed the following. The majority of the users described the "Vocab Training" section of the website as the most useful for language learning. Five out of the 12 users who responded to the open-ended questions indicated an interest in seeing the content of the tutorials expanded within the Vocab Training section.

Sample Responses included,

The French tutorials have not been completed at this time. I'm currently using it to increase my vocabulary and to hear the pronunciations.

Would really like a tutorial to learn the verbs and how to conjugate, as it's so helpful to continually do exercises to refresh my memory.

I haven't tried the tutorials yet, they appeared just as I was back from Spain. I was wishing for a bit of grammar training before the trip.

Users indicated that both the "Discussion Board" and the "People (chat) page" were the least useful for reaching their language learning goals. Responses from 25 users expressed concern about the social aspect of the website and the "dating" element over learning elements of the site. Others expressed frustration with the limited capabilities of the site to collaborate and learn from other users. Sample user responses are as follows:

Some people seem to think this is more of a dating website.

I am disappointed because this area is mostly used by people who want to meet other people.

There is no chance to have video conversations with people.

Maybe it's just me but the info for collaboration is rather limited. I had a few attempts to establish a tandem but it is unclear how such thing is supported by Babbel. Any workflow?

When the users were asked how to improve the Babbel website, 43 provided suggestions. Two main recommendations were (a) the need for more exercises, tutorials, and control over one's learning and (b) easier ways for users to engage in audio and video chat with other users. The following are some of the users' responses:

Tutorials on how to conjugate verbs in French would be very helpful. Its great learning words in French, but not helpful if you don't know the correct conjugation of the verb to make a complete sentence.

I think a voice chat would help to learn too.

The site needs more flexibility. Having to do that silly magnetic letters thing is maddening! You should let people pick and choose what and how they want to learn.

When the users were asked about their experience of learning a language via Babbel, 26 responded, the majority of whom described excitement over what Babbel has to offer and also suggested a need for more content and more ways to learn a language. Some users stated,

[The website] is very interesting because it can help the people learn a new language and talk around the world.

I love your site - it's so easy to use!

I use Rosetta Stone for a full language lesson, but I like to use Babbel just to run over vocabulary refreshers.

Just want a possibility to change the level.

### Phase II: Responses From The Potential Users of the Three Websites

A usability test was conducted for this phase of the study. The pedagogical and technical usability issues uncovered during the usability testing are presented for each website.

Palabea

Technical usability issues. After initially exploring the Palabea site (see Figure 1 above), the majority of the users described the Palabea homepage as complicated and unclear. User A described the site as "complicated, I don't know what this website is about. Too many unnecessary things here … it would take some time to learn more." User C felt that the Palabea home page "was not clear that it is language learning website for adult learners." Some users found the site to be childish, cartoony, and meant for a younger audience. They described a concern over the possible use of a social network in a "young-looking" site. User E enjoyed the color scheme and design but also felt that it was meant for a younger audience than the other sites.

After logging in and working with a profile page (see Figure 4), the users found the log-in page to be easy to use and easy to understand. They liked the circles that were used to indicate language ability level for each user, but the majority of users also described confusion over how to change their own ability level or indicate the language they wished to learn. User D wanted to change her profile page to indicate her intermediate ability to speak French. While she understood the use of the circles to indicate her ability to speak Spanish, she could not find an easy way to change the language or to change the number of circles. The majority of users had difficulty changing the language and ability options on the Palabea website.

Figure 4
Palabea Profile Page
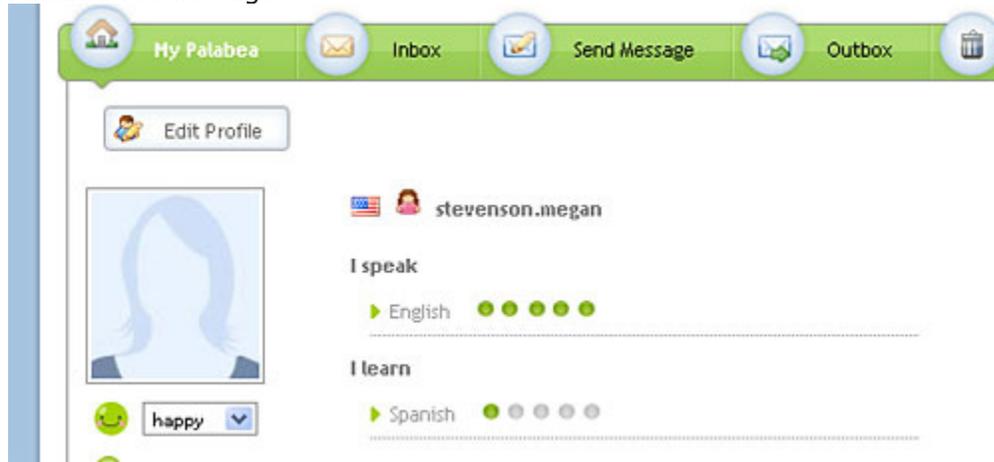
Pedagogical usability issues. For the pedagogical usability task, the users were asked to find a translation for a certain phrase. At this point, most users had to hunt through the site, searching in vain for a dictionary or other type of translation tool. Once they were able to find the dictionary, with the guidance of the researcher, many users described initially seeing the dictionary icon somewhere. They thought the icon looked like it was part of the banner (see Figure 5). User E felt that the dictionary icon "did not stand out … it was not clear at all. I would have expected to see a phrase translation … I would have just left this site and gone to Babbelfish." The users also described confusion and irritation that the dictionary did not translate phrases, sentences, or paragraphs, but instead only single words. They described a need to be able to translate more than one word at a time. User C was the only user who indicated he would have used the social network to find a native speaker to help with the translation of a phrase. Users were able to translate specific words within the phrase, but not the entire phrase itself.

Figure 5
Palabea Top Banner
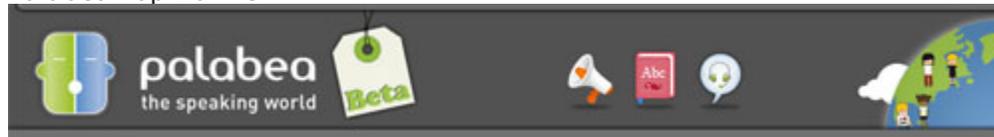
Social interaction issues. After being asked to show how they would find other users to practice a new language, three users found the location easily, while the other two had to be guided by the researcher to the Community tab to find the pool of site members (see Fig-

ure 6). The users then described the need for more and clearer options for narrowing down the number of learners they found in the pool. User B attempted to use a filter that was set up to allow users to specify the type of learner they were looking for. He entered in the age, language, and location of the type of users he would be interested in contacting, and the site then gave him a list of zero users. When he adjusted the filter, he only found one user that fitted his search. During these tests, the sites either provided either too many or too few users to choose from.

Figure 6
Palabea Friends Page
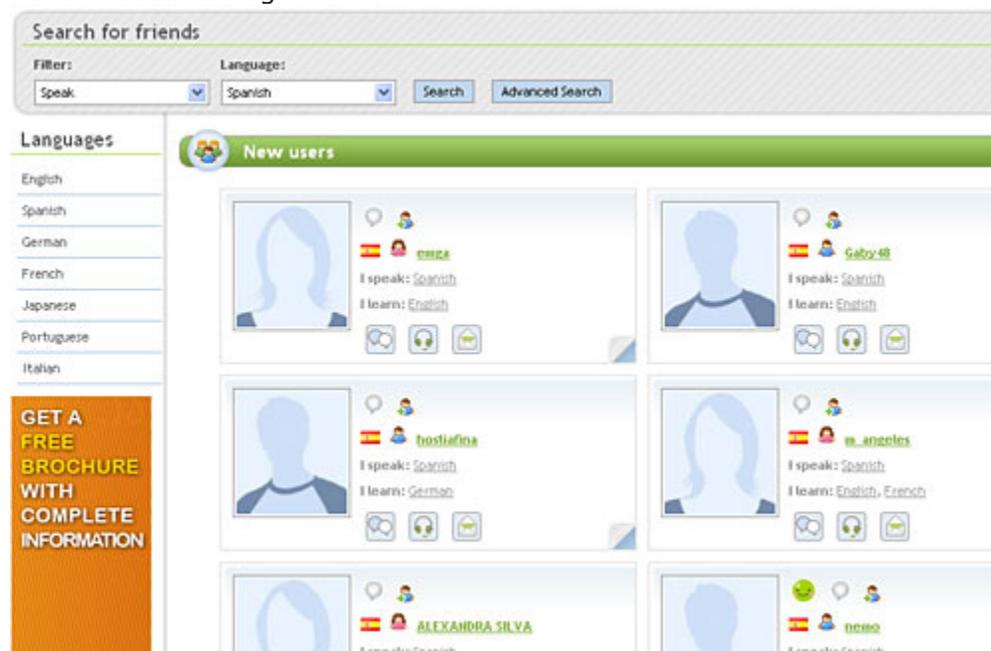
Overall user reactions. The final task was open ended to allow users to show how they would work with the site if they returned for another visit. Most users described an interest in revisiting the video clips within the elearning section of the website. The clips that most interested the users were video lectures uploaded by other users that described aspects of the foreign language and the foreign culture. The elearning section also provided links to virtual classrooms, lessons, podcasts, and other users. The users also indicated they might try contacting other users but were unsure about the quality of learning opportunities they would have with other users within a social network. User A indicated that she "would try both native speakers and other learners, because if native speakers don't speak English, they would be unable to communicate at all." Most users wanted to find lessons, materials, and courses and to be able to practice a new language before interacting with others. User C described wanting to "practice basic sentence patterns before interacting with others" and wanted the ability to "get scaffolding from the Palabea website."
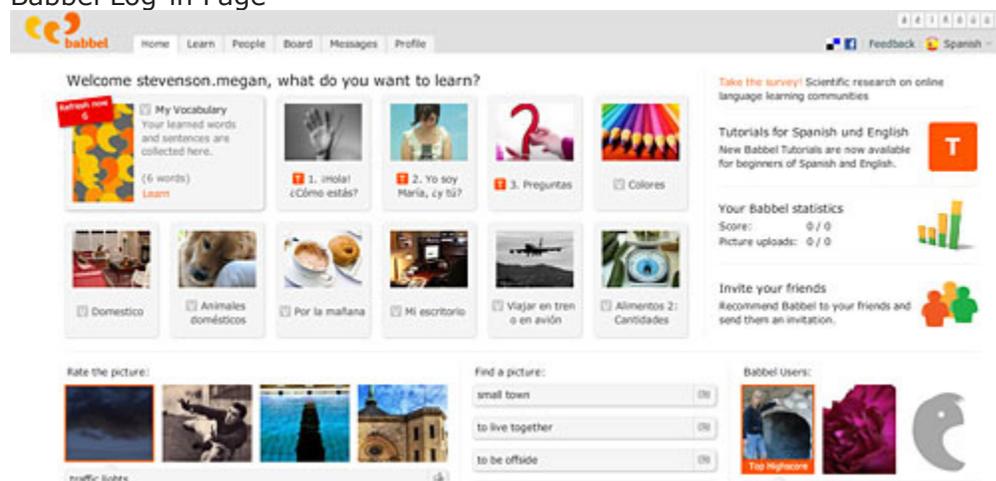
Babbel

Technical usability issues. During the initial exploration of the Babbel website (see Figure 2 above), some users indicated that they liked the simple layout and clear language, but the

majority of users also expected to be able to click on the text and icons to get more information. User E indicated that she "liked the simple layout and could find everything in one place." However, User D felt the Babbel home page was "not very useful, not enough detail or info." Two users also felt that the "More about Babbel" had too much content as opposed to the home page that had too little content.

Some users described confusion over the layout and content of the log-in page (see Figure 7). User A initially thought that the pictures were profile pictures and felt she had to guess on the meaning of the content because "there was no translation." Most users also felt there was useless information on the log-in page. User B understood the page to be a vocabulary page and liked the overall layout of the page, but did not like all of the content areas presented on the page, including "Rate the Pictures" and "Statistics." One technical usability issue that surfaced was when User C pressed the browser "Back" button after logging into the website, he was taken completely out of the site. This happened multiple times during User C's test, and he was confused as to why he was not simply taken back to the homepage. User A also described the log-in page as "visually appealing, but a new learner would not know where to start."

Figure 7
Babbel Log-in Page

Pedagogical usability issues. For the pedagogical usability task of finding a phrase translation in Babbel, the majority of the users attempted to do so in the "Learn" section (see Figure 8). Once they realized they were in a vocabulary lesson, most mentioned their less-than-favorable reactions to the simplistic style and content of the lessons. User C felt that he would have to go through everything within the Learn section to learn something very simple. After changing his ability level to see if he could access a more difficult lesson, he found that the lessons were the same no matter what ability level he put into his profile. Most users did not know where to go to find a translation, and no users described a desire to ask another user within the social network for help translating a phrase. This task highlighted both the pedagogical usability issue of difficulty in finding a translation tool as well as how constrained the users were when attempting to learn new words and phrases.

Figure 8
Babbel Learn Section
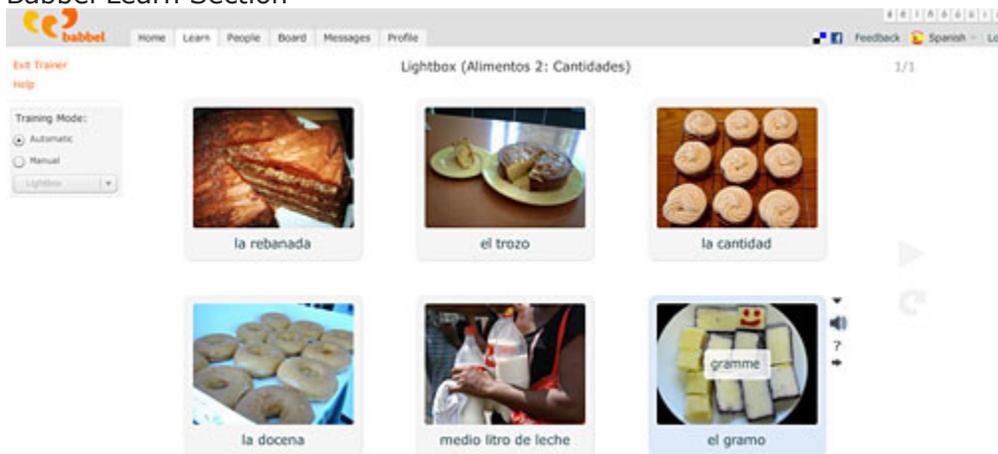
Social interaction issues. When asked to find other users within the social networks, the majority of the users had an easy time finding the network pool (see Figure 9). Most wanted more information on each potential contact and a clarification of categories and terms such as "Tandem partners." User E described a need for "less social networking and more like a learning website with a social aspect."
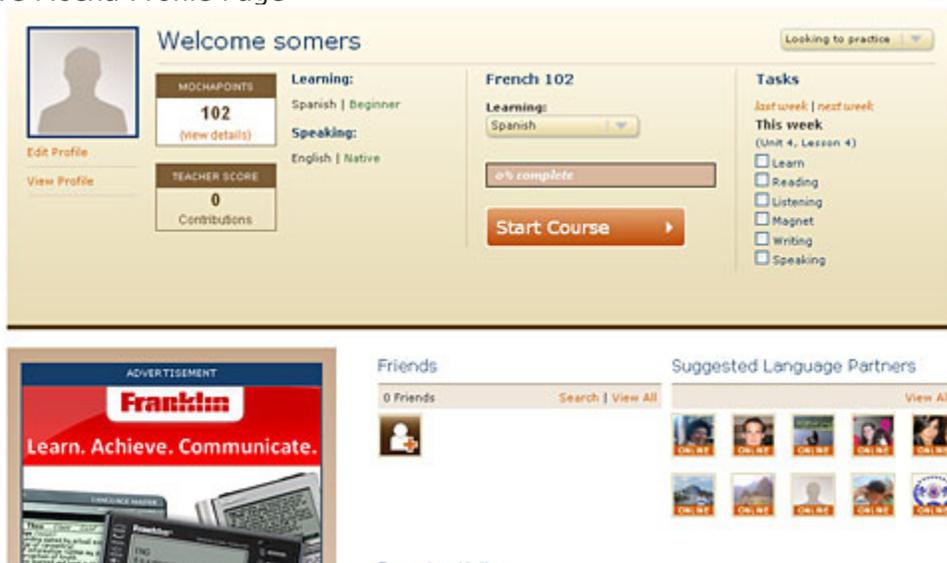
Figure 9
Babbel People Page
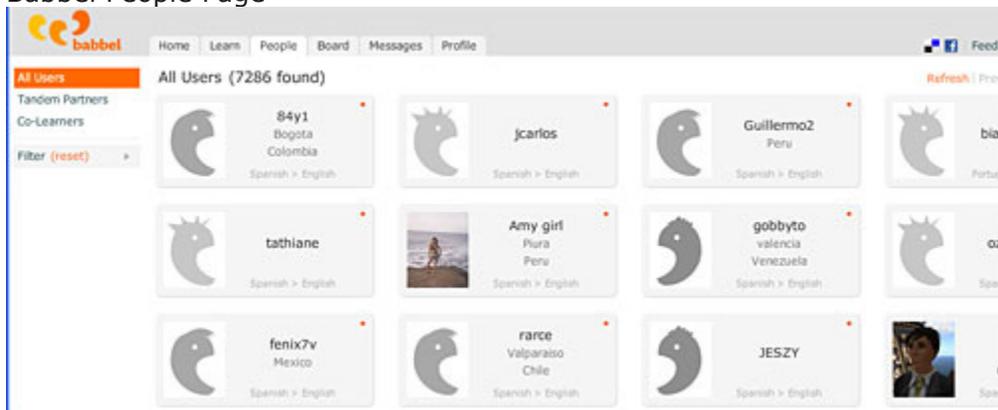
Overall user reactions. The users expressed an interest in using the social network but first preferred to try lessons and assessments before reinforcing what they had learned with another user. From prior language learning experience, User A indicated that she would need "interactions with others for real-world [language] learning." While User B had difficulty with the "Learn" section of the Babbel website, he indicated that upon return, he would go back to that section to try out lessons and tests to "reinforce learning." All users wanted more control over the lesson content and the ability to pick the words, phrases, and topics they wished to learn more about.

Live Mocha

Technical usability issues. During the exploratory task with Live Mocha (see Figure 3 above), the users described a clear understanding of the site's message and goals. User A indicated that "this website is better. I know what it is about … motivated to explore more … not so complicated." User C described a clear expectation of what he would find on this site from the layout, tagline and content on the home page. However, User D described her distaste for the design with her comment of "Yeah, you're hip, but you may not last." She felt Live Mocha looked less like a language learning site and more like a traditional social networking site. User E also felt the message of the site was clear, but "not appealing to me … looks like I'm going to a MySpace page."

After logging into the site, the majority of the users had an easy time working with their profile and changing content within their profile page (see Figure 10). They found it fairly easy to use because of its consistent look, feel, and design.

Figure 10
Live Mocha Profile Page

Pedagogical usability issues. When asked to find a translation of a simple phrase, all users clicked on the Practice section of the site (see Figure 11). Two users expressed concern over the use of the word "Enroll" for courses and assumed they would have to pay money for a lesson. User B discussed his confusion, "Enroll in this course … do I have to buy it? Enroll implies money!" The majority of users were looking for a simple dictionary; only one user (User E) indicated she would contact another user within the social network to ask for help and said she would do so only after she had developed a relationship with another user within the network.

Figure 11
Live Mocha Courses Page

Social interaction issues. When asked to show how they would find other users within the social network to help with learning a language, the majority of users had difficulty finding the place to locate the user pool. The naming convention in the navigation was confusing to the users, and most had to be led back to the profile page to see the list of other users. User A was confused by the use of the word "Tutor" in the navigation. She described an interaction with another user as "sharing [the learning of a language]. I don't want to have to tutor someone." Once they found the user pool, the users wanted more information about each contact and their level of language ability. User B wanted to be able to contact native speakers to learn French. He wanted more details on the users he found in the network because "how do you know what the other learner's abilities are? I don't want to find another 'me.'"

Overall user reactions. Most users wanted to go back through the Live Mocha lessons and underscored the need for more descriptive content within each lesson. Only User C indicated he would come back to interact with other users. He felt that the advantages of this site were the "social interactions and amount of access to different users." While the majority of the users had complaints about the organization of the lesson content, all users described their preference for the structured content and felt they would return to try out the lesson materials.

DISCUSSION

The results of the online survey showed that while users felt the social networking elements of the Babbel website were less useful than the other sections, there was still an interest in learning a new language from other users. The majority of the users of the Babbel website were fairly new to the site. They came to Babbel to learn a language for fun or for travel, and most were not taking a formal language class. They were interested in interacting with other users but also concerned about the use of the social network for dating purposes or other nonlearning social interactions. They appreciated traditional content such as tutorials and vocabulary training but also indicated a need for Babbel to provide easier ways to learn

from other users and a desire for greater user control over the website's content. In general, the users were excited about the possibilities a site like Babbel could offer them as language learners and were able to describe why this type of site may be an improvement over other ways of learning a language. From the usability testing, several overall themes emerged.

Traditional Learning Content Versus Social Interactions With Other Users

Users wanted the ability to access lessons, vocabulary, and other types of traditional learning content before interacting with other users. User D described being "shy" and "not knowing what to say" if she interacted with another user in the social network. User C had the most interest in using the social network to talk to native speakers, but he also described a need to practice with static lesson content before attempting to communicate with others. All users expressed some hesitation regarding the use of social networking without some kind of preparation.

Social Language Learning Versus "MySpace" For Language Learners

Most users said they were interested in the social elements of the websites and the possibility of learning directly from a native speaker. However, they also noted a distaste for any element within the site (design or content) that reminded them of popular social networks such as MySpace or Facebook. User E discussed how the elements and images on the Live Mocha home page reminded her of a social networking site, which made her feel less interested in using the site. User A, when editing her profile page, did not see the need for the field that asked for her relationship status and was confused why she would want to know the relationship status of other users. She felt the site should be built for learning a language, not for finding others for the purpose of establishing social relationships.

Need for Better Translations Tools

All users described a need for easily accessible traditional dictionaries/translation tools. The websites that did have these translation tools allowed users to translate only one word at a time. Users expected to be able to translate sentences, phrases, and entire paragraphs. While User C said he would have asked another user within the social network for a direct translation of a phrase, the majority of the users wanted the ability within the sites to have access to a quick translation tool. Many users, when having difficulty finding the tool, described the desire to leave the language learning site completely and use Google or Babbelfish instead.

Concern Over the Quality Of User-Created Content

While the majority of the users were intrigued by the idea of materials created by other users and native speakers, they had concerns about the quality of the content of these materials. They were also concerned about the answers they would receive if they interacted with users within the social network. They wanted to access other learners who spoke English and had some teaching experience in a foreign language. User A described wariness for trusting the answers she would receive from other users within the social network if she asked a language learning question.

Interest In Interacting With Native Speakers Versus Language Learners

For the users who felt they would be comfortable interacting with others within the social network, they described a preference for native speakers over other language learners. They felt that a native speaker would be able to provide better answers than another language learner.

Interest In Traditional Ways Of Learning a Language Over Social Network Interactions

While the users expressed an interest in social networks as a way of learning a new language in general, all of them sought traditional means for learning a new language, such as lessons and other static content. This point was made clear by their preference for sites that they perceived as having the most traditional learning content.

Overall Preferred Site By Potential Users: Live Mocha

The site that the test users liked the most was Live Mocha. While users mentioned some usability issues and some wariness regarding the design and organization of the website's content, they also felt it had the most straightforward lesson content as well as the easiest procedures for users to interact directly with native speakers.

The results of the usability tests showed the users' interest in the potential of collaborative language learning, but also showed the importance of static, traditional content for language learners. While the social networks could give users access to a resource not otherwise available on traditional websites or even within the foreign language learning classroom, the importance and value of traditional language learning content cannot be denied.

One specific task that was designed to test the pedagogical usability of the social networks required the users to find the translation of a simple phrase. All three tested sites, according to the users, failed in this task. In most cases, users were unable to find a direct translation of the phrase and most of the users expressed hesitation with respect to asking other users within the network for direct translations. At the very least, these online social networks must provide multiple ways for users to find the information they are looking for, both through the use of Web 2.0 solutions and Web 1.0 solutions.

CONCLUSION

Results from both the survey and the usability testing showed great user interest in traditional Web 1.0 learning technology. This may be due to the newness of the idea of using social networks for learning a language, but it also may be due to the user's need to learn specific reading and writing skills through the use of tutorials and readings. Learning content found in Web 1.0 websites may still hold relevance for today's users (De Weber et al., 2007). A successful language learning website may need to provide traditional Web 1.0 learning content, appealing Web 2.0 collaborative interactive tools, and a design that is convincing, interesting, and easy to use for adult users who wish to learn and collaborate with other language learners.

The technical usability and pedagogical usability of these tested sites also affected whether users would be willing to return to the websites to achieve individual language learning goals. Sites that provide a way for users to reach their learning goals are given more posi-

tive feedback than the sites that present confusing information or irrelevant design elements not directly related to the user's learning goals.

There is also a need within these sites to ease adult learners' concerns over whether they are engaged in high-quality learning in a website or not. Sites that employ design elements reminiscent of MySpace or Facebook may turn adult language learners away. Specifically, sites that look "young," "cartoony" or look like a "dating website" as opposed to a "learning website" will alienate adult learners who visit a website with specific educational goals in mind.

Given that research is just now beginning to emerge on the use of Web 2.0 in language learning, this evaluation serves as the first step for understanding the role Web 2.0 may play in foreign language education. More research is needed to determine the effectiveness of Web 2.0 tools for meeting specific long-term learning outcomes within formal and informal language learning environments. The new types of social networking features seen in Web 2.0 may provide great benefits and opportunities for students and teachers in the field of foreign language education, but the relevance and quality of these collaborative learning environments for educational purposes will still need to be explored.

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APPENDIX A

Babbel Online Survey

Thank you for participating in our survey. This is an independent academic survey conducted by the University to discover how learners use technology to learn a new language. Babbel has given us permission to link this survey from their website. We are not directly associated with Lesson Nine or Babbel and we are solely responsible for the content of this survey.

*1. You are being asked to participate in an online survey to help us better understand how you use Babbel! Your participation is entirely voluntary and the survey is completely anonymous. The purpose of this survey is to discover the usefulness and potential of online social networks for foreign language learning.

Do you agree to have the anonymous results of your survey be part of our research on how online social networks help people learn foreign languages?
O Yes
O No

*2. Are you over the age of 18 years?
O Yes
O No

3. How long have you been using the Babbel website?

☐ - more than 6 months

☐ 3 - 6 months

☐ 1-3 months

☐ less than 1 month

4. How did you first hear about our site?

☐ friend/classmate

☐ teacher

☐ search engine

☐ blog

☐ read about it in a newspaper/magazine

☐ other social network

☐ Other (please specify)

5. What is your first language?

☐ English

☐ French

☐ Spanish

☐ German

☐ Italian

☐ Other (please specify)

6. What language(s) are you learning using Babbel?

☐ English

☐ French

☐ Spanish

☐ German

☐ Italian

7. Why are you learning a new language?

☐ Business

☐ For fun

☐ Travel

☐ For a class

☐ Other (please specify)

8. Are you taking formal language classes?
O Yes
O No

9. What are your major goals for coming to Babbel?

☐ learning new vocabulary

☐ finding others who share my interest in learning a new language

☐ finding native speakers

☐ accessing multimedia content (pictures, sounds, pronunciations)

☐ developing a social group

☐ other (please explain)

10. What areas of the site do you find most helpful for meeting your goals?

☐ Vocab Training

☐ Tutorials

☐ Learning Reminder

☐ People (chat page)

☐ Discussion Board

☐ Inbox

☐ Other (please explain)

11. What areas of the site do you NOT find helpful for meeting your goals?

☐ Vocab Training

☐ Tutorials

☐ Learning Reminder

☐ People (chat page)

☐ Discussion Board

☐ Inbox

☐ Other (please explain)

12. Do you frequently use the online chat to interact with other Babbel users? If so, do you more often speak in your native language or in a foreign language?

☐ I only speak in my native language

☐ I mostly speak in my native language

☐ I rarely speak in my native language

☐ I only speak in a foreign language

☐ I mostly speak in a foreign language

☐ I rarely speak in a foreign language

13. Do you most frequently chat with others who speak the foreign language you wish to learn?

☐ I always chat with others who speak a foreign language

☐ I mostly chat with others who speak a foreign language

☐ I rarely chat with others who speak a foreign language

☐ I only speak with others who speak my native language

14. Has the use of Babbel affected your day-to-day use of the new language? How so?

☐ I have more confidence in my ability to speak the foreign language

☐ I have more confidence in my ability to read the foreign language

☐ I use new vocabulary more frequently

☐ It has not affected my day-to-day use of a foreign language

15. Is there anything you would want added or changed to the Babbel website that would help you learn a new language?

16. Any other comments?

APPENDIX B
Usability Testing Questionnaire and Tasks

Pretest questionnaire

Name: _____

Age: _____

Country of origin: _____

What language is your first language? _____

What are other languages you have learned or are learning?

Please rate your 2nd language learning skills:

Low 1———2———3———4———5 High

How did you learn a second language? Why did you choose to learn a new language? Are you taking a formal language class?

How comfortable are you using a computer?

Not comfortable at all 1———2———3———4———5 Very comfortable

How comfortable are you using the internet?

Not comfortable at all 1———2———3———4———5 Very comfortable

Do you use any of the following websites (Palabea, Babbel, Live Mocha)? How long? Why?

Exploratory task (5-10) minutes

What do you think this site is about?

Site #1	Site #2	Site #3

Who do you think this site is built for?

Site #1	Site #2	Site #3

What is your first reaction or impression of the site's organization and design?

Site #1	Site #2	Site #3

Do you think it would be easy for the user to find the information he/she is coming to the site to find?

Site #1	Site #2	Site #3

Palabea Tasks:

Set up a profile (using test login) and search for other users that would exchange languages with you.

Find out how to find the translation of a certain phrase in the second language. Find out how you can hear exactly how it's pronounced.

Explore what area you would most likely visit if you were going to this site.

Babbel Tasks:

Set up a profile (using test login) and search for other users that would exchange languages with you.

Find out how to find the translation of a certain phrase in the second language. Find out how you can hear exactly how it's pronounced.

Explore what area you would most likely visit if you were going to this site.

Live Mocha Tasks:

Set up a profile (using test login) and search for other users that would exchange languages with you.

Find out how to find the translation of a certain phrase in the second language. Find out how you can hear exactly how it's pronounced.

Explore what area you would most likely visit if you were going to this site.

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