

“Linguistic Benefits of Social Interaction in the K-Pop X (Formerly Known As Twitter) Communities for Translation Trainees”

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ABSTRACT:

Translators have a great opportunity to acquire a language in an immersive environment through social networks, with native and non-native speakers, which helps to strengthen their language skills and therefore increase their confidence in understanding and using it with others, this results in an increase in student motivation to continue learning (Ghafar 2023, Putra Nasution 2022).

The purpose of this study was to identify the linguistic benefits that social interaction in K-Pop communities on X brings for translation trainees. We adopted a mixed exploratory and descriptive research approach, and one-on-one interviews were conducted on five students from the BA in Modern Languages (in the field of translation) from a Mexican university. Findings of this study show that translation trainees can take advantage of social networking as a way of immersion for language acquisition. Hence students can take advantage from their personal preferences and learn things that they can use in their professional careers. We hope that this research opens a new window of opportunity to what could be a new form of language immersion.

KEYWORDS: Social interaction, social networks, X, linguistic benefits, K-pop communities.

RESUMEN:

Los traductores tienen una gran oportunidad de adquirir un idioma en un entorno inmersivo a través de las redes sociales, con hablantes nativos y no nativos, lo que contribuye a reforzar sus habilidades lingüísticas y, por tanto, a aumentar su confianza a la hora de comprenderlo y utilizarlo con otras personas, lo que resulta en un aumento de la motivación de los estudiantes para seguir aprendiendo (Ghafar 2023, Putra Nasution 2022).

El propósito de este estudio es identificar los beneficios lingüísticos que la interacción social en comunidades K-Pop en X aporta a los estudiantes de traducción. Adoptamos un enfoque de investigación cualitativa exploratoria y descriptiva, y se realizaron entrevistas individuales a cinco estudiantes de la Licenciatura en Idiomas (en el área de traducción) de la Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco. Los resultados de este estudio muestran que los estudiantes de traducción pueden aprovechar las redes sociales como medio de inmersión para la adquisición de lenguas. De esta manera, los estudiantes pueden sacar provecho de sus preferencias personales y aprender cosas que pueden utilizar en su carrera profesional. Esperamos que esta investigación abra una nueva ventana de oportunidades a lo que podría ser una nueva forma de inmersión lingüística.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Interacción social, redes sociales, X, beneficios lingüísticos, comunidades K-pop.

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Social interaction is a process of communication and exchange of information between individuals or groups in a social context” (Laurent, 2023). Is fundamental for human development and their language skills, without it we wouldn't be able to communicate with others (Hurst, Wallace & Nixon, 2013; Verga & Kotz, 2013). The way we acquire a language when we are children is that we observe our environment and try to copy the thing we see and hear (Verga & Kotz, 2013). Therefore, the social context in which we develop helps to shape us as individuals (Roseberry Lytle & Kulh, 2018).

Social interaction is essential for the development of language skills whether you are acquiring your mother tongue or an additional language (Hurst, Wallace & Nixon 2013; Verga & Kotz 2013). When we acquire our mother tongue, we can get an immersion and first-hand social interaction because everyone around us is

speaking that language. But when it comes to second language acquisition is not that easy if our only exposure to that language is going to be that one- or two-hour class twice a week. We need to create more opportunities to be exposed to that language we are acquiring whether inside or outside the classroom (Al-Zoubi, 2018; Lewis and Rush, 2013; Sah, 2015).

Some scholars have conducted previous research on the importance of social interaction in language learning, highlighting the linguistic benefits it brings; such as Verga & Kotz (2013), they conducted a research on how relevant social interaction is on adults learning a second language, as well as Roseberry & Kuhl (2018), in their study they analyse the benefits of social interaction in children from a neurological approach. Some other researchers have already published research on the benefits of social interaction in social networks for second language learners, e.g., Sah (2015) who conducted a study to show that Twitter can be used as a language learning tool and students can improve their language skills through it; some others like Faiza (2020) decided to conduct similar studies but focusing on specific communities within these social network sites, such as K-Pop communities.

“They have been argued to positively affect students' language abilities, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, spelling, motivation, and creative and critical thinking when implemented in English learning.” (Ariantini, 2021)

As stated by Ariantini these are some of the linguistic benefits that students can acquire through online social interaction. These can be used to gain an advantage in their school life or professional careers.

Social networks have changed the way we interact with each other, creating new opportunities for communication. It introduces a new way of interaction with people from around the world, whether native or non-native speakers (Putra Nasution, 2022; Malik, 2019). The easiest way of acquiring a language is through immersion and practice, social networks offer both (Al-Zoubi, 2018; Putra Nasution, 2022; Malik & Haidar, 2020; Ghafar, 2023; Umirov, 2023). It has been proven by Malik and Haidar (2020) that non-English speakers who interact on social media tend to do it in English (since is considered a global language) and eventually improve their language skills and vocabulary.

As translators is not enough to learn just to communicate with others, we must understand how each of the languages that we study work, we must be aware of the cultural aspects linked to the use of the language, we must know idioms, slangs and a lot of different aspects that require a deeper study, so that we are able to deliver accurate translations (Aznur, 2018; Aznur, Intan & Rou, 2019).

Laurent (2023) stated that “social media has a significant impact on social interactions from the perspective of the sociology of communication”. Social network allows us to interact with each other, leaving aside limitations like space and time (Malik, 2019). Among the current platforms X is the easiest place where you can interact with anyone, also the news travels faster than in any other platform (Malik, 2019). X is a multi-platform Social Networking Site (SNS) available to users from a range of devices, mobile or not. (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018)

X (formerly Twitter) is a Social Networking Site (SNS) founded in 2006. The main attraction of this platform is the speed and the ease with which information reaches everyone. It uses a method of microblogging in which allows someone to post a tweet, and everyone can see it, repost it or reply to it (Sah, 2015; Lewis & Rush, 2013). As stated by Faiza (2020) X is the top conversational platform for the K-Pop community, spreading the information with tweets mostly in English due to its global population, creating open spaces for discussion and other fandom activities.

Fandom activities have been heavily criticized over the years, especially in the early adulthood years, many people tend to judge and criticize, saying that it is a teenage activity and that they should grow up (Cahyani & Purnamasari, 2018); some parents may think it's a waste of time, that can be distracting from school, but what if these online activities can actually be beneficial for our professional careers. K-Pop X communities are based on algorithms. According to your posts, follows, likes, reposts, or bookmarks you will get recommendations on your timeline according to those preferences and that is how you enter to a community, by interacting with people who have the same tastes and identifying yourself with them (Lewis & Rush, 2013; Malik, 2019). One of the main activities and attractions of X in the K-Pop communities is the translation of information when the companies release information or when the idols go livestreaming, the bilingual fans offer to translate the information almost real time for the rest of the fans who don't speak Korean (Aisyah, 2017; Malik, 2019; Aznur, 2018; Aznur, Intan & Rou 2019).

The main reason why we decided to run this research is because we have already experienced this situation and could notice some advantage over the other classmates. As someone that has experienced this side effect of fangirl life on social networks. We have noticed how our language skills improved and we could apply this knowledge when translating in class, so we decided to investigate whether this is a recurring phenomenon in other DAEA translation students and if they have been capable to apply this knowledge during their training as translators.

Social interaction helps language acquisition and the confidence of people to use it, so translators have a greater opportunity to acquire a language in an immersive environment through social networks, with native and non-native speakers, which helps to strengthen their language skills and therefore increase their confidence in understanding and using it with others, this results in an increase in student motivation to continue learning (Ghafar, 2023). This research opens a new window of opportunity to what could be a new form of language immersion.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research follows a mixed exploratory and descriptive approach, since the main objective of this study is to identify the linguistic benefits that social interaction on X (formerly known as Twitter) brings for translation students from a Mexican university. Focusing on students that also belong to K-pop communities. The inclusion criteria for this study were 5 female students from the BA in Modern Languages (in the translation field), all of them between their 8th and 9th semester, that at the same time are K-pop fans and have an active X account. One-on-one interviews were applied. The instruments for this research are an interview guide and a comparative table.

The assumption of this work is “Social interaction among K-pop fans on X can bring translation trainees (non-English speakers) linguistic benefits such as improving their language skills and learn about other cultures.” It should be noted that no research has been carried out in this context.

The research instruments for this study were: an interview guide and a comparative table. The interview guide was divided into three analysis categories: social networking, language and culture acquisition and motivation. These categories were obtained through a previous research and analysis of the subject. For the first category, social networking, we asked about their social connections and their networking; for the second category, language and culture acquisition, we asked about their language skills and the improvements they have noticed on them, as well as what they have learned about other cultures; and finally for the third and last category, motivation, we asked them if they have felt motivated due to these interactions they have online. After the data collection all the data were entered in a comparative table in order to check the similarities and differences of the answers. The results are presented and analyzed below.

III. FINDINGS

One-on-one interviews were conducted with students of the BA in Modern Languages at the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco, the results of which will be presented in this report.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

100% of the interviewees are Mexican hence they are native Spanish speakers. 60% declared themselves fluent in English, while the other 40% mentioned that they still struggle with English a little bit. Only 40% of them reported to speak a third language but not being fluent on it. The interview was answered by respondents of various fandoms. 60% are part of only one fandom, while 40% are part of two fandoms.

60% of them correspond to the ARMY (BTS’ fandom), one of them also being part of the CARAT (Seventeen’s fandom). Of the remaining 40% one of them is part of the Universe (Pentagon’s fandom) and the other one declared to be NCTzen (NCT’s fandom) and SM Stan (follows all the groups belonging to the SM company).

“My native language is Spanish, but I do consider myself fluent in English as well... I belong to the fandom of BTS, I am an Army.”(P.3)

We asked if the interviewees were part of a specific fan community on X, to which 60% of them answered that they are not part of a community but they follow big fan accounts correspondent to the fandom they are part of, because of that the algorithm presents them tweets with information related to these fandoms. The 40% remaining declared themselves to be part of communities belonging to their fandoms. We also asked the interviewees how often they interact with international fans in English. 60% of the respondents mentioned that they interact online in English daily by replying to other fans’ tweets or by reposting them. The other 40% declared that they don’t interact often with other fans in English.

“On Twitter I’m part of a specific community of people that speak both Spanish and English, and that are fans of BTS and some other K-Pop groups... I do interact more often with people of my fandom in English I think.”(P.2)

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE ACQUISITION

The interviewers were asked whether they use a general-basic vocabulary or a more specific-complex one while interacting. 100% answered that they use a more general-basic vocabulary since the context is informal

“I think I use English with a basic vocabulary because it’s usually just for casual conversations.” (P.5)

We asked if the interviewers had noticed any improvements on their speaking. 60% of them answered that they had noticed improvement because they got to learn some grammar rules through these interactions as well as they gained confidence for later face-to-face conversations. While the 40% answered they didn’t notice improvements since they don’t tend to practice pronunciation with these interactions. For the next question we asked if they had noticed any improvement in writing. 80% said that they have in fact noticed improvement because they tend to answer to comments or write posts, however they made it clear that they only have informal conversations, so they got to learn slangs and acronyms in English. 20% said that they still feel a lack of confidence on their writing despite these interactions.

“Well, as I said I don’t use to speak with international fans, but I think that reading and learning that kind of vocabulary and structures helped me to improve my speaking, but I tend to have a little lack of pronunciation, but I think in the part of the grammar I had a lot of improvement... I felt that I’ve had an improvement in my English, for example, I see what expressions they use to communicate to each other’s and new vocabulary and maybe a little bit about grammatical structure.” (P.1)

Continuing with the language skills we asked what improvements have the interviewers noticed in their reading comprehension. 100% of the interviewers said that they noticed improvement for different reasons, but they all agreed that reading different posts has helped them to learn new vocabulary hence their comprehension of texts has increased. 20% of them mentioned that they commonly use the translate option to compare the posts in English and Spanish and they got to notice that sometimes the translations are incorrect. Another 20% mentioned that they read a lot of fanfictions (stories written by fans) and this helped them a lot. The last 60% has increased their vocabulary by reading updates of their artists and they also agreed that when they don’t know the meaning of one word, they look it up on internet. To bring closure to the questions about language skills, I asked whether they have noticed improvements in their listening. 40% of the interviewers mentioned that they haven’t seen an improvement in their listening, since they only interact with written posts. While the other 60% declared that they have improved their listening because they tend to interact with videos in English.

“In the case of my reading comprehension is better, as I tend to read updates on different topics and some more complex than others, so I think I have improved... My listening has gotten better as well because I consume a lot of content that is in English, and I enjoy it. Most of the content that I watch is in English.” (P.2)

For the next question I asked the interviewers if these interactions have helped them to expand their vocabulary. 100% of them answered that they increased their vocabulary as they copy the words used by the people with whom they usually interact. Continuing with the vocabulary section we asked if the interviewers have acquired slang whether from their fandoms, from other cultures or ethnicities. 100% declared that they have acquired slang mainly from their fandoms and K-Pop community in general, they also mentioned that the country from which they have learned the most slang is the USA. Related to this we also asked the interviewers if they considered that their fluency in English has increased when expressing their ideas. 40% of them mentioned that they have noticed an increase on their fluency, making special mention of the vocabulary acquisition they have had thanks to social networks and the confidence they get thanks to that. While the other 60% haven’t noticed any improvements.

“Since I do communicate a lot with people that are native English speakers I have picked up certain words and vocabulary, so I do think it has extended my vocabulary... I do pick up a lot of slang because that’s just mostly how they communicate in English and when I don’t know the meaning of something they are talking about I just search for it or ask and it’s just a way of learning new things... Yes, I think I get a lot of confidence with all that I learned on internet. Also I know some friends that just using internet, they improved a lot of their speaking, grammar, etc. And I can see how all these networks help me in my second language learning.” (P.4)

Another important point that we found interesting to know about is whether they have learned about other people cultures. 100% of the interviewers answered that they have thanks to interacting with fans from all around the world who share their experiences, customs, food, music, etc. They mentioned that they perceive this as a cultural exchange that is available to everyone.

“People like to talk a lot about their cultures and just share how they are and what they do, and those are interesting topics of discussion and it just help us to communicate and know each other better, so I have learned a lot about it.” (P.3)

MOTIVATION

The last question was whether these language exchange experiences helped our interviewees to stay motivated and engaged with their language learning process. 100% answered that they find motivation because they perceive these interactions as a useful input and output of the language, it has helped them to gain confidence since they think of it as a practice. They all agreed it is an excellent way of acquiring new vocabulary, slang, grammar. And not only learn the language but also information about other cultures. 20% of the interviewees declared that it also motivates them to keep learning other languages.

“Yes, because I have noticed that it is easier to understand what I’m reading or watching. We need to keep in touch with the language, so this has helped me to not just learn slangs, but also the culture, the language structures, also improve reading and listening skills.” (P.1)

“All of these has helped to motivate me to continue learning English and other languages, and I think that being able to communicate with other people in different languages is great. I can also learn new things about the culture, and I would like to be able to travel to other countries like Canada and Korea.” (P.5)

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings show that translation trainees can take advantage of social networking for their professional careers. English is considered by many, a universal language, since approximately 20% of the world’s population is fluent in English. Thus, it is commonly used online by native and non-native speakers to communicate with each other. The most effective ways of acquiring a language are the immersion and practice, social networks offer both (Putra Nasution, 2022).

Online interactions tend to be casual and use informal language, it is not common to find complex vocabulary on fans’ conversations, although you can sometimes find educational posts or threads. That is why users learn a lot of slangs from different countries, languages and cultures. Fans can take advantage of these interactions to acquire new vocabulary, not only by memorising, but they can notice in which situations and context the new word is used.

The skills that users can develop a little more are reading comprehension and writing since the main source of communication is by tweeting, quoting or responding to other tweets (Sah, 2015) (Figure 1). They can freely join to discussions, or create their own, read news, updates, or different content (Figure 2) and thus they learn new vocabulary, at the same time and thanks to all this input they rapidly acquire the grammar of the language so their fluency increases. As a result of this some of them realized that they can’t trust the automatic translators, since it is not always accurate. Although they can practice a bit of listening by watching the videos posted, or by joining or creating a voice room, but not many users are up for that kind of interaction, at least on this social network. There are other platforms that focus more on these skills but it is not the case for X, which at least in the case of translation trainees does not represent a major problem because their focus is on reading and writing.

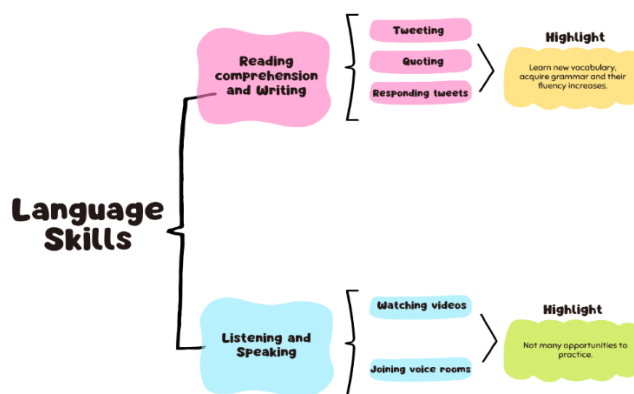


Figure 1. Findings in interaction

K-Pop fans usually learn, thanks to their idols, about Korean culture and traditions. By all these online interactions and bonds that fans tend to form, some of them share about their daily lives, their culture, traditions, food, etc. Thanks to this they develop a sensibility and respect for the other cultures. The users can also find motivation, since they are able to reach information about their interests on first hand, when they realize that they are able to understand either a text, a video or some new vocabulary without a machine help they have declared feeling so happy and proud about themselves.

A common thing among the answers is that the interviewers that declared to spend more time interacting with other fans online, are the ones who declared to notice a major improvement on their language skills and motivation, this new method of language immersion can be beneficial for them not only for English language, but also for other languages that they wish to learn in the future to add to their professional life. There are already some professors implementing this as a new source of language acquisition inside and outside the classroom (Lewis and Rush 2013).

Students tend to spend many hours interacting on social networks that are predetermine to adapt to their personal preferences, thanks to this they have the opportunity to connect with people from around the world that have similar interests. This enables, as it would happens with face-to-face interaction, to start learning and acquiring different linguistic and cultural aspects from each other. They might not realize that linguistic and cultural exchange that occurs through these interactions, since it is something that they enjoy, but they realize later when they are able to understand something new, or when they can hold a more fluent conversation. All this leads to motivate them to keep interacting and improving in the language, or even to learn more languages so they can grow their social networking and boost their professional life.

V. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that social interaction on Twitter actually benefits our lives by improving our language skills. We can also acquire new knowledge such as vocabulary, slangs, and other aspects of life, like culture, gastronomy, music. The fact that we are able to communicate with someone from across the world, in a language that we don't commonly use in our daily context, it is proved to be a powerful method to gain confidence when communicating and as our progress is more noticeable it keeps our motivation strong enough to continue our efforts.

The students can take advantage from their personal preferences and learn things that they can use in their professional careers. As English is always taken as a universal language is the easiest one to find online but we can also apply this language acquisition method for other languages. And not only on the K-pop communities, as stated before X works with an algorithm that personalize your timeline so you can get the information related to your interest. Professors are starting to use this method inside and outside of the classroom to put their students into a real-life situation where they can practice and learn.

For the context that this study is being employed can serve in the future as a tool for learners to gain confidence and experience in a second language. All this through interaction in communities that share their interests while benefiting their professional development.

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