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Using a Non-Judgmental Stance to Promote Trustworthiness in Action Research

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Abstract

This article describes the use of action research to increase trustworthiness through a non-judgmental approach. Two foreign language lecturers implemented an action research to improve their teaching with the use of Facebook and mobile devices. In order to remain open to all possible interpretation of the events and to incite their students to provide them with honest feedback, they openly adopted a non-judgmental stance. As a result, students freely revealed how they used funds which were given to them to access mobile Internet. Findings showed that not all students used the money as was anticipated by the lecturers, and that they spoke without restraints on the matter. This behavior has led the researchers to reflect on how this stance helped validate the trustworthiness of the data for the research, and encouraged them to focus on not judging their informants.

Keywords

Trustworthiness, Action Research, Truth, Interviews, Researcher-Respondents Relationship

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This article describes the use of action research to increase trustworthiness through a non-judgmental approach. Two foreign language lecturers implemented an action research to improve their teaching with the use of Facebook and mobile devices. In order to remain open to all possible interpretation of the events and to incite their students to provide them with honest feedback, they openly adopted a non-judgmental stance. As a result, students freely revealed how they used funds which were given to them to access mobile Internet. Findings showed that not all students used the money as was anticipated by the lecturers, and that they spoke without restraints on the matter. This behavior has led the researchers to reflect on how this stance helped validate the trustworthiness of the data for the research, and encouraged them to focus on not judging their informants. Keywords: Trustworthiness, Action Research, Truth, Interviews, Researcher-Respondents Relationship

The present article has a dual focus. The first focus is centered on an action research venture conducted in Malaysia where we attempted to transpose the foreign language classroom's learning management system (LMS) to Facebook on mobile phones. The second focus is on our effort to ensure that the respondents provide honest feedback as we promote a non-judgmental stance. To address the first focus, we distributed a subsidy to every student to enable them to purchase access to mobile Internet. Investigating how they spent this subsidy and how they discussed it provided information serving our second focus. As researchers and lecturers we strive to improve our teaching method through practitioner research, more commonly known as action research. As we struggle to make our teaching more efficient, we evaluate our actions and gauge them by the impact it has on our students. This is achieved through regular enquiries with our students on the difficulties they encounter and even on their ease of learning. Their feedback is generally collected through questionnaires at precise moments in the course, but more often semi-guided interviews are used to gain a deeper insight on how the students are experiencing our teaching.

Problem Statement

When we use interviews as the primary source of data to evaluate our own practice, we place a great deal of faith in our respondents' honesty. This raises one important question "how do we know that what the participant is telling us is true?" (Seidman, 2006, p. 23). This question is particularly crucial when the researchers are lecturers, and the respondents are Confucian heritage students.

McTaggart (1989) proposes 16 tenets of participatory action research. In the fifth tenet he describes the method as being a systematic investigation technique. For McTaggart this is achieved by keeping an open mind to adapt to the unexpected. Despite clear indications, we failed to grasp the best manner in which to remain open. Hashim in her article published in

2005 offered seven tenets of action research. We believe that the second tenet helped us resolve our dilemma. Hashim proposed not judging the informants as a way to remain free from biases. She further advised to follow this tenet from the beginning of the research to enable oneself to remain able to analyze the data from different perspectives.

Successful adoption of this non-judgmental approach has been reported by several qualitative researchers (i.e., Brown, 2008; O'Halloran, 2003). Respondents are less likely to feel judged and answer what they assume are expected responses when the interviewers are viewed as insiders (O'Halloran, 2003). Yet, in the present study the researchers did not have the same advantage of being considered insiders. Furthermore, members external to a group tend not to be trusted (Buchan, Croson, & Dawes, 2002). For this reason, the non-judgmental stance needed to be coupled with an effort to strengthen the relationship and increase trust to increase validity.

Armed with this information we decided to tackle our research on teaching French with Facebook on mobile phones with a non-judgmental attitude. First, we aimed to observe whether it would enable us to improve the reliability and validity of our data; and increase honesty of our respondents. Second, we sought to corroborate our findings by triangulating responses from different informants and different methods of data collection. Third, we intended to interpret findings with an open mind.

Setting

This action research was conducted in a Malaysian public university in a hybrid French as a foreign language course. Students met face-to-face on a weekly basis, and tasks and resources were available through an online platform. The online learning management system (LMS) was not optimal as it did not provide students with sufficient control over the way they could interact with the platform. The LMS allowed them to download documents provided by the lecturers, but not publish their own documents. Similarly, students could only respond to forum posts which had first been initiated by the lecturers, and thus were not able to initiate their own messages. Students claimed that the environment was unappealing and that they would only access it when told by their lecturers that the course notes had been uploaded. Additionally, they complained that access to the LMS was painstakingly slow. The resulting situation left the students reluctant to freely surf on the LMS. Moreover, the LMS did not offer a mobile-friendly environment which could facilitate in-class tasks with mobile phones. For all these reasons, we decided to search for an alternative platform which could resolve these issues. Students eagerly suggested using Facebook to replace the university's LMS. After carefully evaluating the idea and reviewing similar ventures (Baran, 2010; de Villiers, 2010; LaRue, 2012; Loving & Ochoa, 2011; Selwyn, 2007; Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang, & Liu, 2011), we believed that this option might be feasible. Indeed, although using Facebook as an LMS has its limitations, past research demonstrated that this social network had the potential to cheaply replace the more 'traditional' platform (Wang, et al., 2011), while still providing most of the functionalities expected of an educational online setting (LaRue, 2012). Furthermore, it has been shown that the social networking site was widely beneficial to stimulate communication between young adult learners (de Villiers, 2010).

We, the first and second authors, had a shared interest in conducting this study. As a researcher-teacher couple, we spend a tremendous amount of time discussing and reflecting on our practices. We share the same classes and conduct studies together. Discussions on our experiences are not limited to the time we spend in the university and extend well into other parts of our lives. One recurring topic in our discussions revolves around the cultural differences in the social distance between the instructor and the students. Improving our practice often takes the form of action research which relies on feedback from our students.

We have taught Malaysian students for close to twenty years, and we always wondered if the importance of the social distance we observed had an impact on the reliability of the interviews we conducted. Typically, students express positive opinions towards our classes, and hardly ever provide suggestions for improvements. This led us to reflect on a method which could elucidate whether this positive attitude was due to cultural influences or to a genuine satisfaction with our classes. We approached the third author for guidance due to her belonging in the Malaysian culture, to her more senior experience, and to her expertise in education. Together we conceived a method which was centered on our shared research interests.

Method

It is accepted that qualitative researchers should ensure that their work adheres to some form of quality verification (Sparkes, 2001). Quality verification remains an important aspect of our action research to ensure that both our data and analysis are valid. In quantitative research, validity refers to the accuracy of the measurements. This concept may, to some extent, be applied to qualitative research. It has been argued that the term trustworthiness is more relevant to the naturalist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and that quality verification should not be left to the reader with the task of a post-hoc evaluation (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Following this viewpoint, steps were taken during the course of this action research to ensure that quality was an inherent part of the study. Validity in action research should be dependent on one of three types of action research (Newton & Burgess, 2008). These are knowledge generating, practical, and emancipatory. The present study may be characterised as practical, and thus requires catalytic validity and outcome validity. Catalytic validity deals with further understanding the participants, and outcome validity ensures that the outcomes of the research are in line with its objectives (Newton & Burgess, 2008). Both of these validities were addressed in this research.

The nature of the relationship between the researcher and the respondents are rarely disclosed in research reports (Yu, 2011). Our study focused on the disclosure of this relationship, particularly on the non-judgmental stance which was clearly presented to the respondents during the interviews. In respect to this relationship, our main dilemma stemmed from the duality of our roles as researchers and lecturers. The researchers in us long for the neutrality of the relationship between the participants and the investigator. However, the lecturers in us know that in a student-instructor relationship a hierarchical barrier framing the exchange of information will always remain. We sought to develop a trusting relationship which could enable the students to freely express their feelings about our teaching. Thirteen factors relating to trust development were identified (Burnette & Sanders, 2014). From these, three factors were of particular relevance to this study. These were power asymmetry, social distance, as well as the collective vs. individual orientation. Such factors are relevant to qualitative enquires in a Confucian heritage culture such as Malaysia (Park and Lunt, 2015). This unbalanced relationship is systematically taken into account during the research, particularly in the interpretation of data phase. Whenever students express their satisfaction with a learning task, we wonder if their statements are geared to please us as their lecturers, or whether the task was indeed useful for their learning. Past experiences with interviews and questionnaires has shown us that students tended to provide widely positive feedback. It has been argued that whatever the respondents say should be treated as valid (Winter, 2002). However, this should be subject to caution in asymmetrical relationships such as lecturers and students. Although the positive feedback is corroborated with the online anonymous evaluation of our course conducted by our university, it does not provide us with a method to evaluate the students' honesty in their evaluation of our teaching. An action research report should be treated as authentic as long as it reports the respondents' true expressions (Winter, 2002). This

raises the question of evaluating whether the respondents' voices are indeed genuine. There are three situations which negate the authenticity of the respondents' voice. These are, (1) when the respondents lie, (2) when they are telling the interviewers what they want to hear, and (3) when their thoughts have not been adequately conveyed (Hadfield & Haw, 2001). Although we suppose that a method capable of evaluating whether the voices are indeed authentic and genuine might not exist, we believe that action research itself might provide us with a way to better ascertain the trustworthiness of our students' responses.

We selected the action research method as it allowed us to improving our practice. The cyclical progression it offered was combined with the powerful analytical tool provided by grounded theory. The combination of action research and grounded theory, known as grounded action research (Baskerville & Pries-Heje, 1999), enabled us to systematically evaluate two phenomena. First, we assessed how students perceived our intervention. Second, we evaluated how the non-judgmental approach could increase the validity of our interviews.

We planned our intervention so as to fully transfer the online activities that were previously conducted on the LMS to Facebook. Consequently, a Facebook page was created for the course and students were given the relevant address and advised to bookmark it with the Facebook 'like' feature. Subsequently, the course notes were digitised in a photo album format and uploaded to the social networking site. Students were able to review the slides by browsing through the various photo albums. The online forums were replaced by the wall posts in which students could directly initiate posts in the target language without the lecturers' interventions. These posts eventually became threads where the students posted comments and replies to the initial messages. Since we wanted the students to be able to use this new LMS in class through mobile devices, we ensured that everyone was equipped with an Internet-capable mobile device. Students who did not own such a device were lent a smartphone for the duration of the course. Furthermore, in order to provide equal opportunities to all students irrespective of their affluence, we opted to provide each and every one of them with a subsidy meant to cover the cost of accessing Internet on their mobile devices for the duration of the research. This was the only solution we found which could provide every student with the same experience, and thus broaden our sampling opportunities. We are convinced that providing the students with money had an impact on their perception of the class, the intervention, and their relationships with the lecturers. We kept this in mind while conducting the interviews and analyzing the data. Having provided the students with enough money to cover such expenses, we felt that we could freely ask them to use their mobile phones in class to produce learner-created content which they subsequently uploaded to Facebook. We believed that no one would object to the cost involved in accessing mobile Internet. Consequently, students were regularly assigned in-class collaborative tasks where they shot videos on their phones. While still in class, these videos were posted on Facebook where they were subjected to peer-review and subsequently improved.

The cohort consisted of 17 undergraduate students who majored in French. Over the course of six semesters, students attend general French courses, French for specific courses and content courses. No prior knowledge of the language is required before enrolling in the program. The study was conducted with students from the third semester. All students were Malaysians and issued from three ethnic groups (eight Malays, eight Chinese and one Dayak). There were 15 females and two males. Their ages ranged from 20 to 21 years. Although the institution where the study was conducted did not require the project to be submitted to an ethical review board, tacit institutional approval was established through the granting of a research fund. Ethical safeguards were presented to the students with an information sheet (see Appendix A), and by inviting them to sign a consent form (see Appendix B). All but one student agreed to participate in individual interviews. It was clearly explained that this would have no effect on her grades or on our perception of her. Three students were selected to participate in

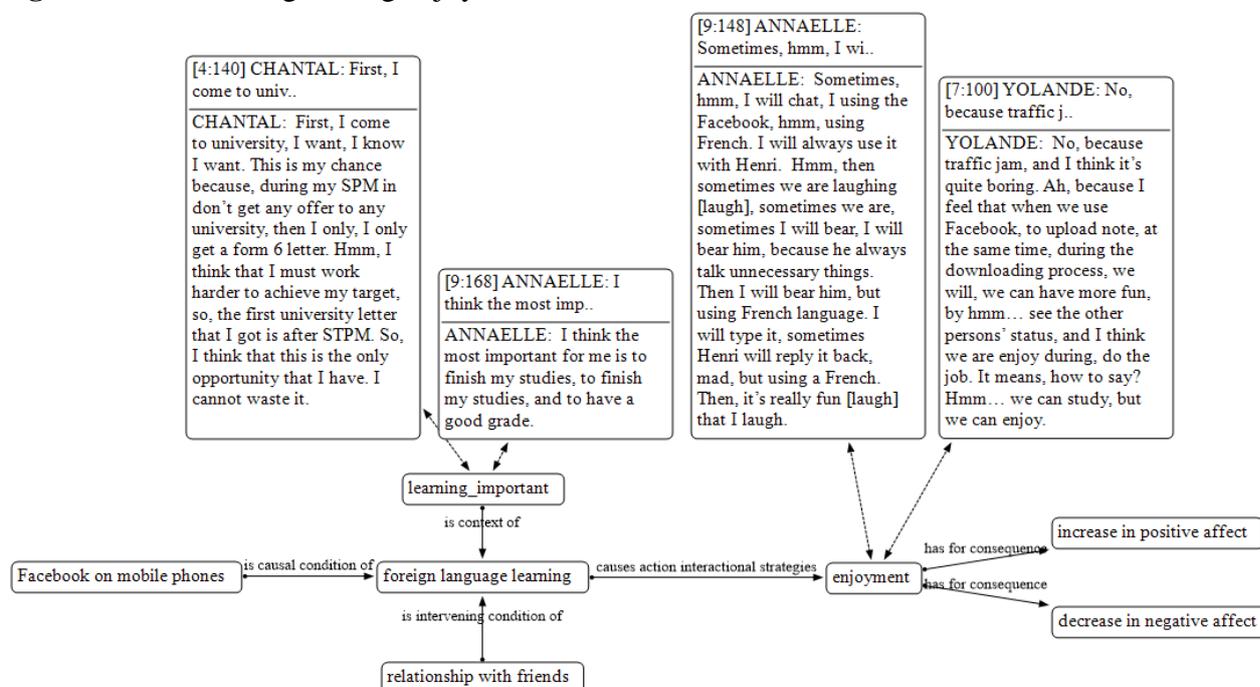
interviews based on their level of online participation. Four more students were identified when we employed a snowballing technique and asked the initial group of respondents to identify others who were knowledgeable and capable of sharing their experience. Our respondents suggested that we interviewed two more students from the second cycle onwards. We conducted five cycles of interviews with nine students in order to reach saturation.

Throughout the duration of the course, students were invited to take part in one-on-one interviews where they freely talked about their experience of learning French with Facebook on their mobile devices. Interview protocols were devised before each interview to help us focus on the information we required (see Appendix C). The protocols were sufficiently flexible and allowed the students to provide unexpected information on their experience. The interviews were recorded, and transcribed by the first author. A pragmatic verbatim transcription including hesitations, stuttering and laughter (see Appendix D) was adopted as it provided a close record of the interviews (Evers, 2011). The second author checked the transcription for accuracy. Initially, member checking was used as a mean to verify the validity of the transcription and its analysis. Due to the complexity of conducting such a check, member reflection was introduced within subsequent interviews to validate our analysis. The data was then anonymized with pseudonyms to conceal the identity of the informants and subsequently coded using the ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software. Anselm Strauss was consulted by Heiner Legeiwe, one of the developers of ATLAS.ti, and provided valuable input for the development of this computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We believe that this cooperation is reflected in the features offered by ATLAS.ti to conduct a grounded theory analysis. Online observations were also conducted and the students' artifacts were systematically downloaded from Facebook. The data analysis adhered to the three-level coding of systematic grounded theory described by Strauss and Corbin. At each level of coding, ATLAS.ti was used to produce diagrams illustrating the analysis. First, open coding enabled the emergence of themes and categories. The constant comparative method was used to refine these codes (see Appendix E). Second, axial coding was used to identify the relationships between the categories. Using the coding paradigm devised by Strauss and Corbin, axial coding models were constructed to enable us to visualize these relationships (see Figures 1 and 2). Third, selective coding was used to combine different axial coding models into a higher level model. This third level coding also made use of the coding paradigm (see Figure 3). ATLAS.ti enabled us to import several axial models into a network view and reorganize them to highlight overlapping themes. Throughout the analysis, we used the memo feature of the software to keep track of our reflections and to trial out modeling the data. As axial coding models emerged, we returned to our memos and updated them with our new reflections. Throughout the whole course, students were kept informed that they were participating in a research study and that our aim was to understand the way they used Facebook and mobile phones to learn French. We made it clear on multiple occasions that we would not judge the way they used both technologies, and that we mainly sought to gain knowledge from them. During the course of the interviews, we strived to remind the students that there was no right or wrong answer, and that only they could provide us with the information about how they experienced the intervention. This clarification was crucial to the collaborative contract which is assumed between the researcher and the respondents. As past studies have demonstrated (Kingsley, Phillips, Townsend, & Henderson-Wilson, 2010; Winter, 2002; Yu, 2011), such a collaboration is essential to ensure that the research is both effective and trustworthy. An environment that is comfortable and does not pose any threats is essential to develop trust between the researcher and the respondents (Thomsen, McCoy, & Williams, 2000). The non-judgmental stance was essential in ensuring that the interviews and the researchers' opinions did not interfere with this environment.

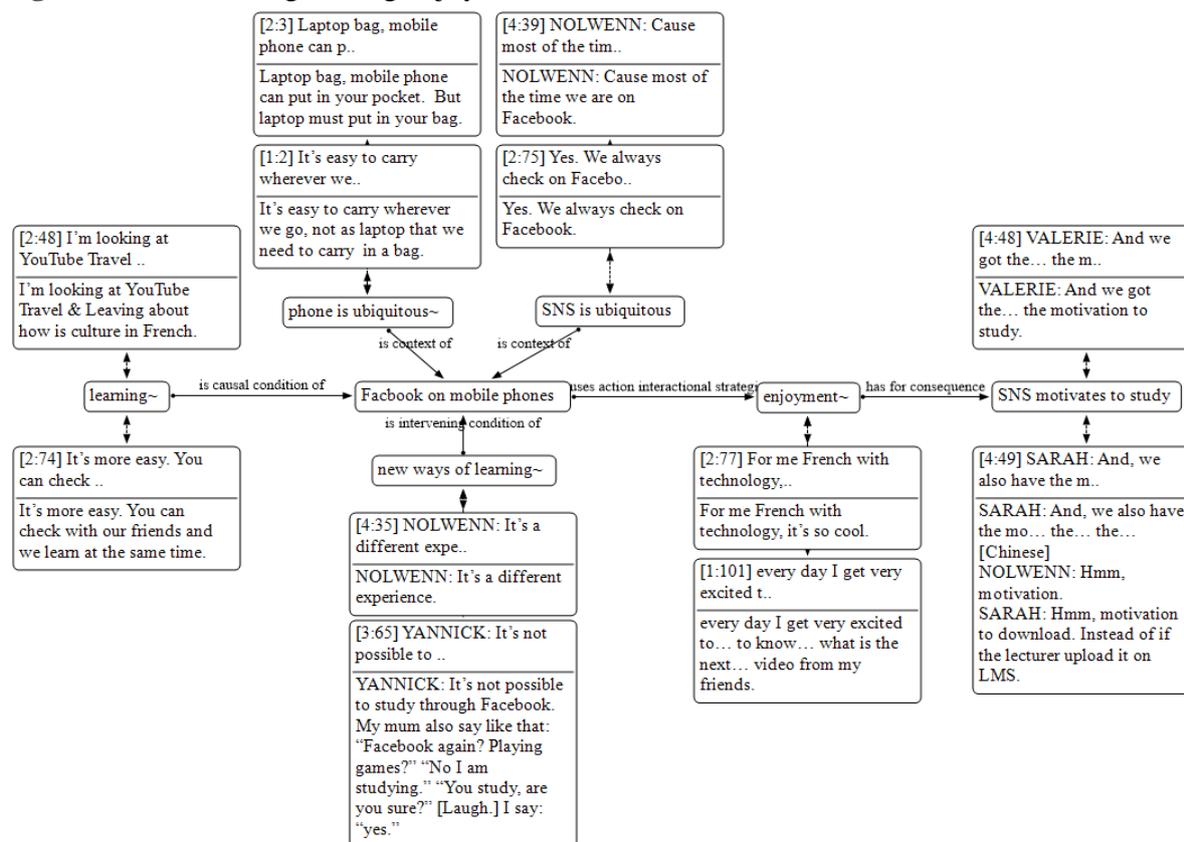
Findings and Discussion

As we collected data on the intervention, we rapidly realized that it was positively perceived. We frequently came across comments such as Annaelle's, a Malay female, for whom *"everything is great."* Open coding revealed that several themes were recurrent during the interviews. Students explained that using Facebook on mobile phones to learn French was truly enjoyable. The social network brought a new dimension to learning as students could download works produced by every member of the cohort. Some students were attracted to the sharing features, others to being able to see their peers' work. Zoé, a Malay female, stated *"I'm happy, because I love to share things."* Julie, a Dayak female, declared *"I love to read others' comment."* It was reported that having introduced Facebook into the classroom changed the learning ambience. Nolwenn, a Chinese female, explained that she enjoyed *"the atmosphere in the class from using Facebook. It's like not a very formal learning environment."* These positive reports were interpreted in terms of affect. Figure 1 illustrates the axial coding analysis linking enjoyment to affect.

Figure 1. Axial coding linking enjoyment with affect

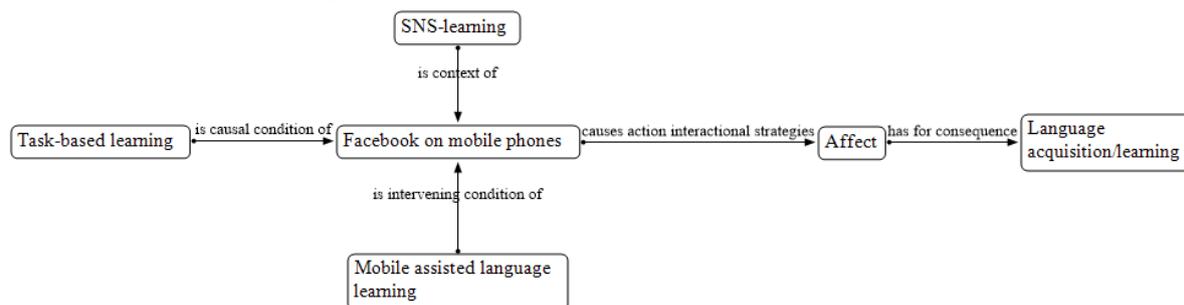


When we investigated further how our intervention impacted affect, we discovered that Facebook on mobile phones had an impact on motivation. Students explained that they felt more motivated to study. This is exemplified by Valérie, a Chinese female, who said *"and we got the... the motivation to study."* This was completed by Sarah, a Chinese female, who explained *"we also have [...] the motivation to download. Instead of if the lecturer uploads it on LMS."* Figure 2 describes how we viewed the students' perspective of the implementation.

Figure 2. Axial coding linking enjoyment to motivation

We used selective coding to review the different axial coding models, and combined them into a more abstract view of our intervention. As can be seen in Figure 3, affect is linked to language acquisition. This is coherent with the theory of second language acquisition (Krashen, 2009). Language acquisition, as opposed to language learning, is a process which remains unconscious. It occurs when students are exposed to and use the target language without consciously applying grammar rules. This is exemplified in the following excerpts taken from an interview conducted with Marie-Thérèse, a Chinese female, “*because, we speak and then firstly we organize ideas, and then we speak, and then the others comment, and then we improve. Which is we speak again, something like that.*” Valérie further explained how using Facebook to learn French increased her exposure to the language:

Hmm... if on Facebook we also have chatting or comment in French. This can help us to improve, because we can use French in life, the big problem for us in studying French because we're not hmm... use the French daily, so if we can have the chance to use the French more hmm... on many fields on not only in class. Actually we can improve our French.

Figure 3. Selective coding

The overwhelming positive responses from our intervention kept us wondering if the students were not simply telling us what we wanted to hear. This leads us to the second focus of the study and the investigation of honesty in the reports. Throughout the implementation of this action research project, we came across several episodes when we consciously reminded ourselves not to be judgmental. These different episodes are narrated in the current section and are illustrated by excerpts from the students' interviews. The notion of verisimilitude enables the reader of the research report to understand and feel the experience of the participants (Loh, 2013). For this reason, representative quotes from the participants were selected in order to bring insight into their experience. As suggested by Carlson (2010), verbatim quotations are provided, and language errors were not corrected. In numerous instances the students recalled the events in the first person; in others they recounted their peers' experience. All these narrations are evaluated in light of the non-judgmental precept of action research (Hashim, 2005).

As described above, we wanted every student to have equal opportunities to access the Internet on their mobile phones. Five students who did not own a phone capable of accessing the Internet were loaned one for the duration of the research project. This represented only 31% of the students as a majority already owned smartphones. Furthermore as past research revealed (Gabarre & Gabarre, 2010), for a large majority of Malaysian students mobile Internet is still considered a luxury which remains unattainable. We believed that the paradox of owning a smartphone without a data plan could be alleviated with a weekly subsidy. Although it was initially envisioned to provide students with prepaid reload coupons, it quickly appeared that this solution was not practical. First, not every student was registered with a prepaid plan as a sizable minority was in the postpaid category. Second, as members of the group used different service providers and different plans it was impossible to find a single price for mobile Internet in the class. Consequently, we decided to provide every student with a subsidy which would go towards paying for access to the Internet on their mobile phone. After a careful market analysis of the various fees to access the web from a mobile device, a subsidy equivalent to 5 dollars per week was set. Subsequently, each student received the full sum amounting to the 14 weeks of the semester at the beginning of the course. We clearly stated that this amount was meant to cover mobile Internet access and that any additional expense would be borne by the students. Each student signed a document stating that they understood the implications of the subsidy and that they would adhere to the university's charter in terms of access to the Internet. As anticipated, the students were overwhelmed to receive this subsidy which amounted to the equivalent of three months rental in the residential colleges. Although we were not naïve to the point that we thought every student would unfailingly spend the subsidy solely to access mobile Internet, we were quite surprised with the revelations made during the interviews.

Indeed, several students hinted that the subsidy might not be spent as we anticipated.

During a one-on-one interview Annaelle asked us the following question: “*Do you think the subsidy is using... the student using... wisely the subsidy?*” Wanting to find out more on this topic, we encouraged her to elaborate on this matter by replying: “*Sorry?*” To which Annaelle rephrased her question in the following manner: “*You think, you give the subsidy money right? Then the students use it to the hand phone... or not? You think, you think, they use it wisely or not, ah?*” When we explained that we only wanted to give every student the means to access the Internet on their mobile devices, and that in no way we forced them to use it to buy access to mobile Internet, Annaelle seemed reassured and moved on to another topic.

Nolwenn explained that she did not purchase an always-on Internet connection for her phone. Nolwenn further clarified that she only paid for the mobile Internet service on her phone in class when the lecturers gave her a task to complete and when a Wi-Fi hotspot was not within reach. She explained that a one-hour access pass for the duration of the class cost less than a dollar, and that she would not make such a purchase outside of class when not on Wi-Fi.

These two revelations led us to openly discuss the subject with the whole group at the beginning of the class. The students were asked to furnish us with details on how they used the subsidies and their feedback was noted on the white board similarly to what was generally practiced during brainstorming activities. This resulted in a list comprising the following replies: buying books, buying make-up, buying clothes, keeping it in the bank, keeping it under the pillow, going to the cinema, going to the karaoke club, paying for the telephone bill and buying petrol for the car.

During the interviews, the students made it clear that money was an important issue to them. Zoé explained that things which were important to her in life were “*Family, money [and] happiness.*” When asked what was important for her in university, she replied: “*Friends, hmm... good results, hmm... and money*” before laughing. On a similar note Annaelle explained that having worked previously she had been used to receiving money and that it made her decision to study instead of continuing to work a difficult one. She then went on to add: “*I love the money, you know, right?*”

Although these quotes reveal the importance of money to the students, Nolwenn plainly described the special place that this subject holds. She stated that: “*We can say, we can discuss anything, about family, and then future planning or even money issue, because however a friend is, however close with a friend, money is always an issue for me.*” Nolwenn further explained that when she felt close enough to someone she would be able to “*Talk about money, without [feeling] awkward.*” Being able to honestly divulge how the subsidy had been used can be perceived as a sign of trust on the part of the students. We believe that by keeping a non-judgmental attitude the students felt comfortable to openly tell us how they had used the subsidy.

During the course of the interviews, we did not detect any instances when the students seemed to lie to us. This does by no mean signify that all accounts were truthful, and only implies that all data was coherent across the different interviews. The researcher should point out any inconsistencies which are detected during the interviews, particularly if the researcher feels that he is being lied to (Flicker, 2004). However, we strongly doubt that if we had detected a lie or passed a judgment on the way the students should have spent the subsidy, we would have received honest answers. Consequently, we would not have known that the money was used for non-course related activities such as going to the cinema or buying make-up. The honesty displayed in these replies comforts us in the validity of the data obtained directly from the students. Although students were able to access the Internet on their devices during the semester, it seems that this was not solely conducted through the wireless 3G network. As a result, we now understand that subsidizing access to the Internet on the students’ mobile device is not a determining factor in the mobile learning scenario that we envisioned. This clearly contradicts findings which we obtained in a previous research (Gabarre & Gabarre, 2009) that

revealed that the cost of accessing the Internet was the main hindrance to mobile learning. More importantly, we strongly believe that the non-judgmental stance was crucial in obtaining truthful and unhindered responses from the students despite the relative social distance separating us.

Although we did not judge the students' behaviors regarding their use of the subsidy, this was not the case with a student's perspective on her peers. Sarah, when asked about how she thought we could improve our teaching, replied:

I'm not sure because, actually this program, this research you give the money for us to buy the data, but I think most of the people they never buy the data, they use, they're trying to use Wi-Fi or some of them even didn't use their own phone to comment, but they borrow others' phone. I think that's a problem.

When queried further on this point of view, Sarah remarked that this behavior which disturbed her only concerned a small number of students. Consequently, she felt that the subsidy should still be provided. These thoughts echo a comment made by Annaelle who thought that in-class tasks using the students' mobile devices and mobile Internet were actually conducted to verify whether the students had subscribed to a data plan. Annaelle believed that the course's lecturers used these activities as a pretext for checking on the students mentioned by Sarah. Annaelle explained that this was for her the expected role of the lecturers, as we had provided the subsidy, and it only seemed natural that we would monitor the students' use of the subsidy. When the true pedagogical purpose of the activity was made clear, Annaelle seemed somehow disappointed.

Conclusion

The reports from Sarah and Annaelle led us to ponder on the declared lack of judgment. We wondered whether our non-judgmental stance would be perceived as a lack of interest or commitment in the students' learning. We questioned whether this behavior would be interpreted as being too lax in light of the conduct of the few students mentioned by Sarah. As a consequence, we once again explained to the group our position, and the need to provide equal opportunities to all. By doing so, we believe that it permitted the students to freely relate to us their perspective of the learning process without fearing our judgment. Furthermore, it demonstrates how we value the students' feedback regardless of whether it depicts a positive or negative aspect of our teaching.

After introspectively reflecting and discussing the matter together, we reached the conclusion that we were willing to take the risk that students might perceive us as being too permissive. We believed that the trade-off for this would be to gain the trust of every student, even those who had not used the subsidy "wisely" as Annaelle put it. Consequently, we did not stir away from the "do not judge" tenet and persisted in our stance throughout this research. We remained open to criticism and refrained from consciously succumbing to biases. Information from different respondents was used to triangulate our findings as several students freely corroborated the events which took place. During the course of this action research, we remained open to the unexpected and were surprisingly amused to discover how the subsidies had been employed. We were similarly surprised to discover that we managed to remain non-judgmental even when the students did not follow the action research implementation we had carefully planned. As we now review the sum of data collected during this action research project, we strongly feel that every word and action recorded from the students is as close to the truth as they were willing to share.

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Appendix A

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

Foreign language learning through ubiquitous mobile social networking

This is a formal invitation to take part in a research. Please read this document before you decide whether or not you wish to participate in this research.

Purpose of the research

This research aims to gather information on the use of social networking and mobile phones to learn French at *****.

Selection of participants

You have been selected to participate in this research as you are currently undertaking a bachelor of French as a foreign language in the *****, and will attend the above mentioned courses.

Free will to participate

The decision to participate in this research is entirely yours. You are free to decline this invitation. If you accept to participate in this research, you will be given this information sheet and will be asked to sign a consent form. Should you decide that you no longer wish to participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time. Participation or non-participation in this research will have no impact on your grades, your evaluation or on future assessments.

Implication in participation

By participating in this research, you will be asked to complete questionnaires and participate in interviews. These interviews will be individually. It is anticipated that each interview will last from 15 to 30 minutes. You will be shown the transcripts of the interviews and will be asked to acknowledge that they are faithful transcriptions of your statements. You will also be shown the researcher's interpretation of your statements and will be able to say whether you agree or not. No risks apart from those in daily life are expected from participating in this research. Your participation in this research will contribute to enhance knowledge in the field of teaching French as a foreign language through the use of technology.

Confidentiality

All information collected throughout this research will remain strictly confidential. Privacy and anonymity will be preserved by changing the names of the participants in the questionnaires and the interviews. All information given during this research will remain anonymous and will not be distributed to other participants or to your other lecturers. All information will be kept in digital form for a period of ten years after the completion of this research. You are free at any time to enquire about any information concerning you (subject to ***** limitations) or about any information you have provided. All publications concerning this research will adhere to the guidelines on confidentiality and anonymity stated here.

Participation

Please complete and sign the consent form to indicate that you wish to participate in this research.

Publication of results of this research

Results from this research will be presented at conferences as well as published in academic journals and book chapters. These results will also be part of a PhD thesis undertaken at the *****. The participants' confidentiality will be maintained as stated above. You may obtain a copy of these results by contacting the head of this research project.

Research funding

This research is funded by the Exploratory Research Grant Scheme provided by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. The researcher is conducting this project as a staff of the ***** and as a PhD candidate at *****.

Research approval

This research has been approved by ***** , by the Research Management Centre in ***** and by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia.

Contact for further information

For further information on this research, you may contact: *****

Should you have any concern regarding the way this research is conducted, you may contact:

*****. **Thank you**

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM¹

Foreign language learning through ubiquitous mobile social networking

Please tick box

- 1. I agree to take part in the above study.
- 2. I confirm that I read and understood the information sheet for the above study and was able to ask questions.
- 3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reasons.
- 4. I agree to take part in group interviews.
- 5. I agree to take part in one-on-one interviews.
- 6. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes in publications.
- 7. I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored on a computer (after my name has been removed) and may be used for future research.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT

DATE Signature

DATE Signature

¹ This consent form is adapted from Oxford Brookes University's consent form available at <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/res/ethics/consent> (downloaded on the 12th of September 2011).

Appendix C

Sample interview protocol

The following sample interviews questions, with their corresponding clarifying and elaborating probes were used in the interviews. Additional questions emerged as data was collected.

- What process do you go through when you want to learn something in university?
- How do you go about learning French and French culture (with technology and without)?
- How do you think learning would have been different without technology?
- How would you rate learning French with your mobile phone on Facebook?
- What do you think of the social aspect of Facebook to learn French?
- What are the problems you encountered and how did you solve them?
- What was your experience in creating a video with your mobile phone?
- How was it to post the video on Facebook?
- What do you think of the other videos on the French courses' pages?
- What did you think of the comments on the videos (to post / to receive)?
- How do you revise before the exam? Did you use Facebook? How did you access Facebook? What do you think of using Facebook to revise before the exam? What differences does it make to you to have access to your notes on Facebook with your mobile phone? When do you use your phone and computer?
- How did you use the subsidy to access the Internet? Was it sufficient?
- Do you prefer to post on Facebook (videos, comments) or do you prefer to access others' documents (videos, comments, lecture notes)? Why is that so?

What else do you think would be useful for me to know to understand how mobile phones and Facebook can be used together to learn French?

Who would you recommend that I talk to in order to gain more information on using mobile phones and Facebook?

Appendix D

The full transcription for this interview is over 5500 words long. This is an excerpt to illustrate the semantic verbatim transcription.

Interviewer: *****
Interviewee's ID: Annaelle
Type: Individual interview

<START OF INTERVIEW>

INTERVIEWER: Okay today is the 31st of October, it's three forty in the afternoon, and the interview is with Annaelle. How are you Annaelle?

ANNAELLE: Yes, I'm fine.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, I would like to ask you, how do you normally access Facebook?

ANNAELLE: How?

INTERVIEWER: Hmm.

ANNAELLE: Before this I just access Facebook using my laptop, but now, 80% I will using my hand phone, because it's so easy, and I was very lazy to open up my laptop, then I think it's not practical, because usually I will only access the internet at my room, or whenever I want to doing my assignment. Now, I have a smartphone, then I buy a plan 8 ringgit for a week, then I can access Internet using data plan everywhere.

INTERVIEWER: I see, so this is unlimited data?

ANNAELLE: It's not unlimited data, but it's just 500 MB, it's only valid one week.

[...]

ANNAELLE: Yes. I'm, I see, I can see, hmm... if I didn't go to class, it's such a waste. So, I, I never skip the class.

INTERVIEWER: Hmm, so you enjoy what we are doing now.

ANNAELLE: Yes, I enjoy, I enjoy the moment I'm being a student, because after this I will work, so, it's very, I don't want to skip a class [laugh].

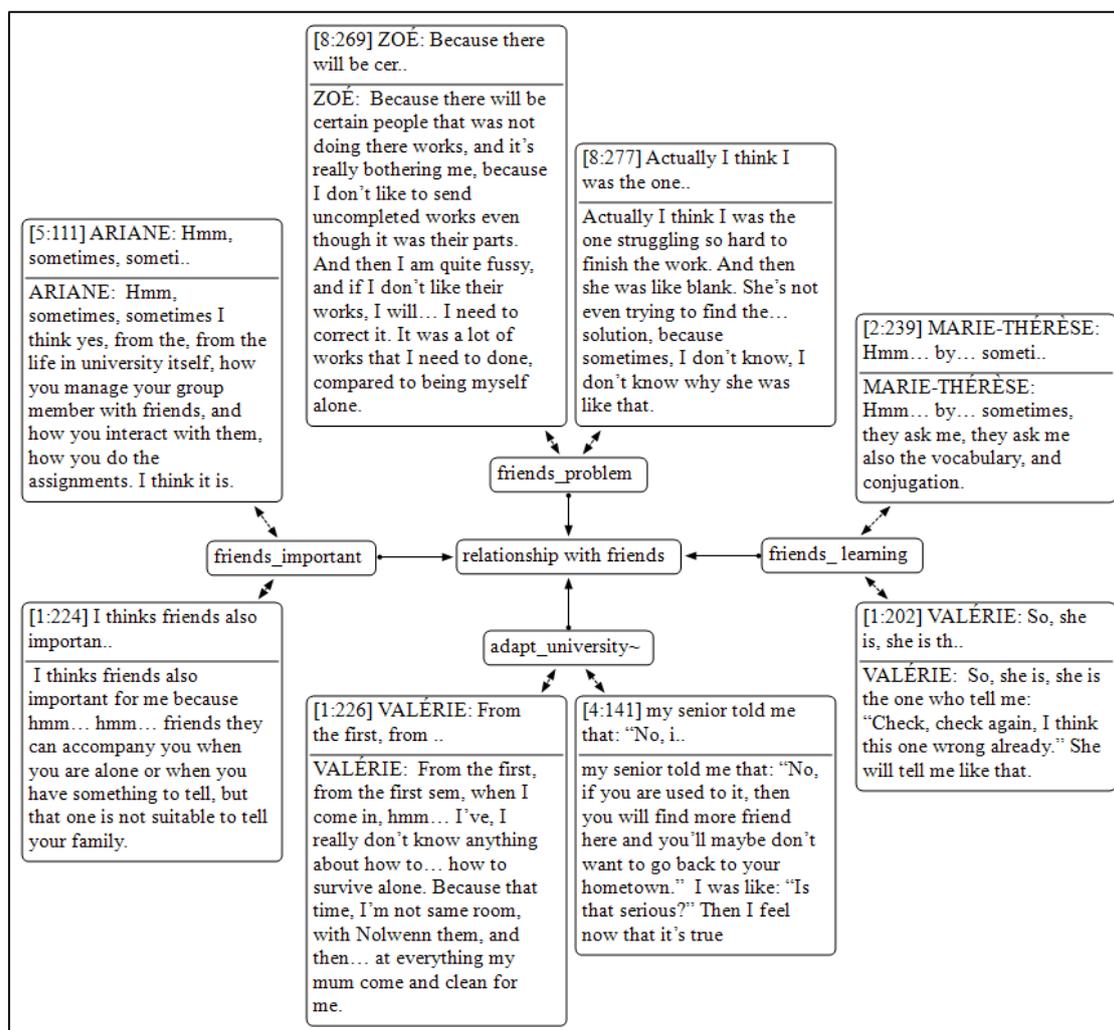
INTERVIEWER: Okay, well I'm very happy if you enjoy it. Thank you Annaelle.

ANNAELLE: Thank you.

<END OF INTERVIEW>

Appendix E

This is the open coding diagram for the category relationships with friends. This category was the result of combining four themes: friends problem, friends important, friends learning and adapt university.



Author Note

Serge Gabarre is currently a senior lecturer with University Putra Malaysia. His research interest focuses on the integration of social networking sites with mobile devices in the French as a foreign language classroom. This interest has led him to investigate the students' emic perspectives through action research and grounded theory. By integrating his teaching with his research, Serge strives to provide an always evolving learning experience to his students. Serge regularly gives talks and conducts workshops across Southeast Asia enabling participants to better integrate technology in the classroom. His previous publications deal with m-learning, e-learning, social networking sites, language acquisition, online collaborative tasks, and qualitative methods. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: serge@upm.edu.my.

Cécile Gabarre's dual field of expertise in instructional design and language teaching led her to develop MALL environments supporting immersive and personalised learning. Technology is embedded in her courses as a mean towards reaching the learners' engagement through increased motivation and confidence building fostered with a ubiquitous access to support and resources. The co-construction of knowledge in a meaningful and caring learning community thus sustains language acquisition processes as well as lifelong learning skills. Her current interests include pedagogical approaches for MALL, teacher training, action research, technological literacies, language classroom management, engagement dynamics and language acquisition. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: cecile@upm.edu.my.

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