Korean university students and their use of social networking sites and online communication for learning Japanese

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Abstract
The emergency of web 2.0 tools has transformed the way language learners use and learn their target language outside classroom. This study examines how Social Networking Sites (SNSs) and videoconference afford Korean university students opportunities to communicate in Japanese. SNSs are where the users can find their friends and people with common interests by searching their profiles, interact and collaborate with them (Nelson, 2010). The motives of the users are to communicate and maintain relationship with the community members by sharing their photos and activities, posting messages, and presenting idealized persona (Dwyer et al., 2007). For language learners, SNSs are beneficial not only to maintain their existing social network but also to create opportunities to practice their target languages. SNSs and videoconference can empower learners to “set up their own cyber interaction with native speakers on their terms, for their own reasons and at their convenience (Eamer, 2010, p. 37). In spite of these significant roles in language learning, none of studies has been conducted to examine Korean university students and their use of SNSs and videoconference to communicate in Japanese outside classroom.

The aims of this study are to reveal to what extent Korean university students use SNSs and videoconference applications to learn Japanese language in class and outside classroom. This study also examines their perceptions of the learning benefits, and factors which inhibit learners to use these online tools for learning Japanese. The participants of this study are Korean university students who study Japanese at a national university in Busan. The data was collected by distributing questionnaires in class. The analysis indicated that the use of technology in Japanese language class is limited to practice typing, write email or word documents in Japanese and very few participants have experienced to use both SNSs and videoconference in their class. This study also identified that learners who passed N1 most actively use SNSs to find Japanese friends and communicate in Japanese outside classroom than learners in other levels do. The participants listed the learning benefits of using SNSs as “I can actually communicate in Japanese and feel happy”, and “I feel more confidence to
Another finding is that many participants do not use SNSs to learn Japanese outside classroom because they do not know which SNSs they should access to meet Japanese speakers. However, most participants, who currently do not use SNSs to learn Japanese, agree to use SNSs if Japanese SNSs are introduced in their class. Similarly, very few students use videoconferences to practice Japanese outside classroom because they are not familiar with videoconference applications or they do not have Japanese friends to communicate via videoconference. The findings indicate that many Korean university students, the generation of “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001), still require pedagogical scaffolding: how to use SNSs to develop their social networking with Japanese speakers, how to relate their social network to create opportunities to communicate in Japanese via videoconference.

Reference