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Facebook as a Communicative Platform in Foreign Language Learning

The integration of social network sites in an educational environment, its communicative purpose and its effect on peer-to-peer communication

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Abstract

Research has shown that communicative language learning classrooms provide the most favourable conditions for foreign language learning (FLL) and foster students' awareness of their own proficiency along the way (McBride 2009; Meddings 2009; Van de Poel 2009). Two main features of this language learning strategy are peer-to-peer communication and peer evaluation. These are features which provide students with an incentive to develop higher level reasoning strategies, critical thinking and self-reflection (Leidner & Jarvenpaa 1995) and therefore have to be encouraged both inside and outside of the classroom. The integration of social network sites (SNSs) in language learning may facilitate the integration of collaborative learning techniques, since they enable the learners to acquire a language in a 'deeply social' communicative environment (Gasiorek et al. 2012), explore language in use and be motivated to yield more linguistic communication themselves (Gruba & Clark 2013; Liu et al. 2013). Applying this platform effectively into the classroom requires a blended approach, an environment where face-to-face instruction is combined with online communication (Graham 2006).

The present case study, which was part of a four-month writing course for first year majors of English as a foreign language, enquires what communicative purpose an SNS fulfils when it is integrated as a peer-to-peer discussion forum into the FLL classroom. The online environment provides two communicative incentives: a social one, inherent to the SNS format (Zourou & Lamy 2013), and an educational one, provided by the educational institution by means of a task-based approach. As an integrated part of their out-of-class writing assignments participants were invited to discuss aspects of academic writing on the Facebook forum. Students' language use was analysed in order to investigate how the two incentives of the forum influenced their communicative strategies. Next to a potential language evolution over time, this study focuses on a third and last research question: To what extent are students aware of the potential educational value of such an online collaborative environment? In this perspective, their attitude towards their own participation, as well as that of their peers is investigated. Also their perceived self-efficacy is analysed in order to investigate whether their metacognitive strategies (Flavell 1979) have evolved over time. In other words, do students have knowledge of cognition (do they know what content to generate in this educational-social setting and how to do so) and can they regulate cognition (are they aware of the reason why they (have to) contribute and of the added value of the collaborative space) (Schraw 1998:113-114).

A quantitative data analysis on participants' language use and overall communication patterns shows how their educationally led interaction evolves in the informal online environment of Facebook. The main indicators are: (1) the overall contribution ratio, from which student engagement can be derived (Zourou 2012), (2) the evolution of academic writing style, measured by contribution length and language complexity, and (3) the number of fallbacks into their first language, a tendency that may be triggered by the social features of the Facebook format (McBride 2009). Qualitative data from two questionnaires shed more light on individual participation patterns by focusing on students' perceived self-efficacy. This analysis shows that (1) they can clearly delineate between educationally and socially relevant communication within one and the same forum, (2) they are aware of the value of peer evaluation and (3) they have a positive attitude towards the user generated content on the forum.

In the end, the forum proved to be an interactional space where educational incentives were discussed, but also provided a social safety net where students helped each other, which exceeded by far the initial purpose of the format. The social communicative purpose of the online environment therefore appears to enhance the educational, a tendency which could attest the educational value such an environment entails.

Table of content

Acknowledgments iii
Abstract iv

Introduction 1
Domain of study 2
Strategic analysis 4
1. Social network sites and foreign language learning 5
1.1 Web 2.0 and social media 5
1.2 Social network sites (SNS) 7
1.3 Facebook in higher education 9
1.3.1 The format of Facebook 9
1.3.2 Community building 11
1.3.3 Integration of Facebook in higher education 13
1.3.4 The role of a lecturer/tutor in an SNS forum 15
2. EFL case study 16
2.1 The Facebook forum: an online communicative environment 16
2.1.1 Online communication through Blackboard 17
2.1.2 Set-up EFL case study 18
2.1.3 Face-to-face instruction: English proficiency 1 – All Write 21
2.2 Methodology 22
2.2.1 Participants 22
2.2.2 Data collection 24
3. Quantitative analysis: student participation and language use on the Facebook forum 25
3.1 Contribution rate 26
3.2 Contribution demographic 30
3.3 Contribution length 35
3.4 L1 fallback 39
3.4.1 Educational vs. social interactional features 41
3.4.2 Comparative analysis 48
3.5 L2 language complexity and readability 51
4. Qualitative analysis 54
4.1 Content analysis 54
4.2 Educational vs. social contributions 55

4.3 Self-efficacy: students' perception and attitudes 64
4.3.1 The educational forum 65
4.3.1.1 Peer-to-peer communication 66
4.3.1.2 Personal engagement 68
4.3.2 The absence of a lecturer/tutor 71
4.3.3 The role of the educational institution 72
5. Suggestions for further research 74
6. Conclusion 77
7. References 79
8. Appendix 87

Introduction

Research has shown that communication and interaction in the language learning classroom provide the most favourable conditions for foreign language learning (FLL) and foster students' awareness of their own proficiency along the way (McBride 2009; Meddings and Thornbury 2009; Van de Poel 2009). One of the most important features of this language learning approach is the integration of peer-to-peer communication, not only inside, but also outside of the classroom. The use of technology in educational contexts can facilitate this contact with the foreign language (FL) outside of the actual classroom, since learners are able to explore language in use and are motivated to yield more linguistic communication themselves (Stanley 2013). They are therefore not only stimulated to experience a language to a fuller extent, but are also motivated to take part in the productive process of FLL by communicating with their peers online. Looking at how new technologies can be put to optimal use in order to provide for a better language learning environment, therefore, has to be regarded as a valid new way of upgrading FLL (Lamy & Mangenot 2013). Peer-to-peer communication outside of the language learning classroom has to be fostered because 'self expression and social interaction are some of the most important contexts for language use that we try to create, or at least imitate, in our foreign language (FL) classrooms to encourage language acquisition' (McBride 2009: 35). Peer-to-peer communication, furthermore, holds considerable potential as students find it more comfortable discussing various aspects of their education with their peers than with their lecturers/tutors (Van de Poel & Gasiorek 2012). Applying this practice outside of the classroom fosters language acquisition by enhancing the language contact of the students with the foreign language. Consequently, the more contact students have with the target language and the more they engage with the language in use – be it receptive or productive – the more the overall language learning process is supported.

Social media and, in particular, social network sites (SNSs), hold a lot of potential in foreign and second language learning (FLL/SLL) when considering peer-to-peer communication outside of the actual classroom (Lamy & Mangenot 2013). These platforms provide a communication environment which has no linguistic restrictions and goes beyond formal, institutionally led forms of interaction (Zourou & Lamy 2013). The language use[1] on these platforms therefore is considered to be 'genuine language use', or language use that resembles real-life, socially led interaction[2] (Sykes, Oskoz & Thorne 2008). The 'deeply social' nature (Gasiorek et al. 2012) of SNSs is the main factor fostering this tendency. However, it has to be noted that these social features also have a drawback: they cause the language use of the participants to change rapidly. This is the case because the interaction on such platforms is generated by a specific community of practice. The group of people who generate the communication and interaction, simultaneously determine the overall language use in a particular online community and so determine what kind of language use is considered effective or successful. Hyland and Hyland (2006) argue that in order to

[1] In the present study, 'language use' is denoted as online written language use produced by the participants.

[2] The term 'socially led interaction' denotes communication that has a social purpose and mostly consists of unrestricted language use, be it written or spoken. Harvey, Hayes and Pharr (2009) denote this kind of communication as 'socialization' (6).

successfully participate in a group, one has to communicate according to the standards of that specific group. Consequently, particular language usage can change depending on which incentives are at hand at a certain point in time and which ones are accepted or rejected by the members of the community of practice. When integrating online social platforms in an educational environment, the incentives to spark peer-to-peer communication have to be well thought through and re-evaluated throughout the process in order to foster adequate educationally led communication. The communicative purpose of such an environment ultimately determines the language use of the participants.

The focus of this thesis is an enquiry into the nature and evolution of peer-to-peer communication on an SNS forum used in an educational setting, and examines what the communicative purpose of such an online environment actually is. Students' communicative purpose namely may change across a certain period of time due to two main incentives they receive in the course of the project: on the one hand, they are influenced by the social incentives of an SNS forum which yields several communicative purposes[3]; on the other hand, they are influenced by an educational incentive provided by the educational institution[4].

It is possible that an SNS forum which is integrated into the tertiary FLL classroom has both a social and an educational purpose. These two purposes may influence the communicative purpose of the online environment, which is reflected in the language use of the peer-to-peer communication. As students' online communication is triggered by two main incentives, it is also necessary to gauge to what extent they are aware of their own contributions to the SNS forum and of its overall purpose.

This study therefore attempts to answer three research questions: first and foremost, it enquires what communicative purpose an SNS forum may entail in an educational setting; secondly, it asks how the social and educational incentives of the online environment influence the language use of the participants; the third and last research question asks whether students are aware of the potential educational value of an educationally used SNS forum and, consequently, of their own peer-to-peer communication.

Domain of study

The domain of study for this thesis is FLL and, in particular, the fostering of a communicative approach in the FLL classroom. The thesis focuses on writing in an academic context as part of an English proficiency course in an FLL university environment. Academic writing is an essential part of FLL in higher education as it puts the knowledge of the students to use and makes them productive with their second language (L2) (Van de Poel & Gasiorek 2012). However, at the same time writing in an academic context might also be an obstacle to a student's academic career as 'learning to write for an academic context is not easy; learning to write for an academic context in a second/foreign language (S/FL) is perhaps doubly difficult' (Van de Poel & Gasiorek 2012: 294). Martinez, Kock and Cass (2011) argue that 'writing anxiety [among university students] is a central concern for

[3] Such as interpersonal communication and community building, see 1.3 Facebook in higher education.
[4] See Strategic analysis.

university faculty' (351). This is the case because students have to perform well and achieve educational goals in an environment which they may not be too familiar with (Van de Poel & Gasiorek 2012). Because of these features, the project on online peer-to-peer communication was carried out in the Ba1 writing course of the English FLL classroom at the University of Antwerp (Belgium). Students in this particular environment are inexperienced in academic writing and may have the need for an online collaborative environment where they can discuss their experiences and assess one another's work in order to gain writing skills and feel more comfortable discussing debatable language points. The use of online tools – in this case an SNS which provides an accessible and widespread communication platform – may form a solution for lowering writing anxiety and fostering a better learning outcome through peer-to-peer communication and peer assessment. Zimmerman and Bandura (1994) argue that writing requires the skills of formulating and expressing ideas which contribute to all types of academic activity. Discussing their own academic writing, as well as several language points through a written medium, namely the online SNS forum, might therefore enhance their overall learning curve even further. The authors remark that writing in an academic context presents challenges to self-regulation, and so to the metacognitive strategies (Flavell 1979) the students will apply[5]:

> *this is because writing activities are usually self-scheduled, performed alone, require creative effort sustained over long periods with all too frequent stretches of barren results, and what is eventually produced must be repeatedly revised to fulfil personal standards of quality* (846).

In this study, the educational purpose of a Facebook forum is analysed through an enquiry into students' peer-to-peer communication. The main goal of this approach is to see how they organise conversations and exchange information on an online discussion forum which entails both a social and an educational purpose. Their organisation and language use provide more insight into the way they perceive the forum and indicate to what extent they are able to distinguish between its social and educational character. The enquiry into the overall communicative strategies[6] consists of four measures: (1) the analysis on student engagement by looking at the number of contributions and the time frames in which they were performed, (2) the evolution of their contribution length across the project in order to analyse the level of language complexity, (3) the fallback into the students' first language (L1), which is an indicator of the amount of social or educational contributions on the forum, and (4) a further analysis of the language complexity and readability of the contributions, focused on the distinction between L1 and L2 contributions. These tendencies provide insight into the overall language use and may uncover an evolution of the students' communicative strategies. The possible evolution is particularly interesting because it provides further insight into the social and educational purpose of such an online environment and into a possible evolution of the students' attitudes towards the use of the forum.

[5] See 2.1 The Facebook forum: an online communicative environment.

[6] Communicative strategies can be defined as cognitive mechanisms which 'manage communication problems' (Dörnyei & Scott 1997: 186) and try to prevent a 'mismatch between communicative intention and linguistic resources' (Varadi 1992: 437). In the present study they are denoted as the different mechanisms the participants apply when conveying different kinds of information on the online forum.

It has to be noted that little research has been done on the language use and possible language evolution of students in an online collaborative environment in the FLL classroom (Blattner & Lomicka 2012). However, this study incorporates findings and analysing strategies from previous case studies in order to provide an extensive view on the educational purpose of an SNS forum integrated in the FLL classroom.

Strategic analysis

The enquiry into the online language use on SNSs in the FLL classroom consists of a case study performed in the *English Proficiency 1* writing course (*All Write*) of *Ba1 Language & Literature – English* (2013–2014) at the University of Antwerp (Belgium). As the online communication environment, Facebook was chosen because it is the most frequently used SNS worldwide and it is a platform in which communication and interaction are deep-rooted[7]. In addition, Facebook provides a virtual setting in which a particular community of practice can be easily established and where the threshold to interact with one's peers is relatively low (Lamy & Mangenot 2013). The main focus of the research is the enquiry into the communicative strategies students adopt when confronted with an educationally led discourse on a linguistically unrestricted social platform (Liu et al. 2013; Gruba & Clark 2013) and how they themselves experience their communication and participation. The students are able to perform peer-to-peer communication on a Facebook forum in which no lecturer/tutor is present. In order to assure educationally led and educationally relevant contributions, an educational incentive was added to the project. This educational incentive is a task-based approach which comprises three monthly writing assignments – called the 'Take Home Assignments' (THAs) – which the students have to complete individually. Part of the assignment description is to discuss writing experiences and debatable language points with their peers online in order to improve their own writing skills and writing assignments[8]. The importance of an enquiry into the online language use of such a forum is exemplified by Lantz-Andersson, Vigmo and Bowen (2013), who argue that 'young people's everyday practice is consequently interconnected with their language-learning activities, even if they do not regularly use social-media contexts explicitly for language learning as such' (294). In other words, using a language online is a practice which enhances FLL, even when the participants are not aware of the value this adds to their learning curve.

The analysis of the social and educational purpose of students' peer-to-peer communication comprises two main analyses: an enquiry into the students' language use and an enquiry into the students' attitudes towards the use of such an online format in an educational environment. One of the goals in this perspective is to obtain greater insight into the metacognitive strategies (Flavell 1979; Schraw 1998) the students apply when communicating with their peers on the online Facebook forum. Metacognitive strategies are patterns which determine to what extent a person is aware of their own knowledge, to what extent they are conscious of how to apply that knowledge, and to what extent they are knowledgeable about why they have to apply that knowledge. In other words, do students have 'knowledge of cognition', that is, do they know what content to generate in the social/educational online setting of Facebook and how to do so? Also, can they 'regulate cognition', that is, are they aware of the reason(s) why they (have to) contribute, and

[7] See 1.3.1 The format of Facebook.
[8] See 2.1.3 Face-to-face instruction: English Proficiency 1 – All Write

consequently of the added value of the collaborative space? (cf. Schraw 1998: 113-114). The enquiry is divided into four main areas of interest: first, students' contribution ratios serve as an insight into their engagement in the project. The analysis of the time spans in which their contributions were performed serves as an additional factor to determine their overall participation patterns. Secondly, mean utterance length sheds more light on the language use of the students and on the level of information their conversations entail. Thirdly, the fallback into the students' L1 is analysed in order to see whether the use of the students' L1 or L2 is connected to the educational and social character of their contributions and of the overall Facebook forum. Lastly, a further enquiry into the language complexity of the students' contributions in L1 versus L2 sheds more light on language evolution and on how the social and educational incentives influence the language use longitudinally. Moreover, the students' attitudes towards the use of the forum are investigated against the backdrop of the empirical data analysis. Their perception of the use of a socially based platform to perform 'educationally led discourse' (Zourou 2012) provides more insight into their possible language evolution. Furthermore, their own perceived gain in L2 proficiency, academic writing skills and confidence is gauged, as well as their attitudes towards the contributions of their peers, the potential role of a lecturer/tutor in such an environment and the role of the educational institution.

In summary, the social and educational features of the Facebook forum are investigated by examining empirical data from the corpus and the content of the students' contributions on the Facebook forum when they are confronted with an educationally led discourse, sparked by a task-based approach, as well as by analysing their attitudes towards the integration of such an environment into the FLL classroom.

1. Social network sites and foreign language learning

Researchers and practitioners of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) have shown a growing interest in the use of social media being integrated into their learning and teaching practice (Zourou 2012; Blattner & Lomicka 2012). SNSs, especially, provide a genuine communication environment (Sykes, Oskoz & Thorne 2008), a communicative feature which many CALL formats appear to lack. However, in order to understand this communicative aspect, as well as its implications for the actual classroom, it is important to first look at the framework in which social media and the social web are rooted: Web 2.0.

1.1 Web 2.0 and social media

'Web 2.0' is an all-embracing term for the organisation and usage of the internet during the past decade. The origin of Web 2.0 can be identified by a change in the nature of information flow among its users (Blattner & Lomicka 2012), which is characterised by creating, using and re-using user generated content (UGC)[9] (Lomicka & Lord 2009). Compared to Web 1.0, users of Web 2.0 are able to upload, alter and use UGC instead of only reading and retrieving information put up by corporations and organisations – the so-called 'dot-com companies'. Lomicka and Lord (2009) refer to this practice as 'downloading'. The Web 1.0 technology ended in 2001 when users started to upload their own content on the internet, which resulted

[9] For the purpose of UGC in the present study, see 1.2 Social network sites (SNS).

not only in more available information, but also sparked interaction between users. In their comparison of the two systems, Kamel Boulos and Wheeler (2007) remark that 'in contrast to Web 1.0, its [i.e. Web 2.0] content can be more easily generated and published by users, and the collective intelligence of users encourages more democratic use' (2). These new features marked the beginning of a new way of virtual information-sharing and online communication, which to this day keep on developing further and further. The reason why an extensive overview on Web 2.0 is given in this study is the fact that without the (r)evolution in information flow, social networking and online communication would not have been possible to the extent that we know it today. Therefore it is important to show what the building blocks of online communication actually are and how they originated.

The term 'Web 2.0' was coined by Tim O'Reilly and his colleagues during a brainstorming session in 2004 (O'Reilly 2005; Musser et al. 2007) and was developed to denote a new, collaborative way of using the Internet. However, since its identification, the term Web 2.0 has been the centre of debate (Bloch 2008; Lomicka & Lord 2009; O'Reilly 2005; Warschauer & Grimes 2007). The term has been found hard to define because of the variety of applications it generates. Many researchers define Web 2.0 as being a technological platform which provides numerous social and collaborative tools and applications. Warschauer and Grimes (2007) argue that the change in online information flow due to these applications is the main feature of Web 2.0 and state that it therefore has to denote the overall system. They define Web 2.0 as being a collaborative online environment. Accordingly, Tu, Bolchner & Ntoruru (2008) define Web 2.0 as 'a Web technology that aims to enhance creativity, information sharing and collaboration among users' (336). These researchers emphasise the importance of content generation and collaboration, features which are also crucial to this research. However, they do not designate the overall framework in which these social features originated, which is Web 2.0. In other words, they define the outcomes of the framework instead of the framework itself. Karpati (2009) refers to Web 2.0 as 'the writable web' (140) and emphasises the importance of UGC, collaboration and regeneration. However, he also does not designate the productive system which generates these ways of interaction and content sharing. Kamel Boulos and Wheeler (2007), being of the same opinion, regard Web 2.0 as a 'social web' (2), emphasising its enrichment of online social interaction. Nonetheless, they do further make the distinction between the framework and the applications it generates, arguing that the Web 2.0 is the overarching structure which enables these applications to grow and to blossom. Zourou (2012) also makes this distinction. She states that Web 2.0 has to be defined as 'the technological platform enabling social media applications to evolve, thanks to the possibilities it gives users to create, distribute, share and manipulate different types of content, most of them publicly accessible' (2). She also suggests that Web 2.0 does not consist of 'a single tool but a set of tools, and that the possibilities for language learning and teaching are multiplied accordingly' (2).

The difference between the description of Kamel Boulos and Wheeler (2007) and that of Zourou (2012) is that Zourou distinguishes between Web 2.0 on the one hand and the 'social web' on the other. When she refers to the social web, she applies the definition by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) which states that the social web is:

> *a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 [sic.], which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content [UGC]* (61).

Zourou (2012) furthermore equates the social web with the term 'social media'. She states that both refer to the same heterogeneous set of applications of social networks; applications which should be regarded as separate from the whole, the framework, the Web 2.0. This distinction between the framework and the applications it generates is important. The social and communicative environment is part of social media instead of the Web 2.0 – a distinction not all researchers have made in the past. The contrast was explained in order to provide clear terminology in this study, as these two features form the building blocks of the communicative approach created in the FLL classroom.

1.2 Social network sites (SNS)

The Web 2.0 is the cradle of multiple communicative platforms and forums on which users are able to interact and exchange information rapidly and efficiently. Over the years, these platforms have evolved into SNSs. An SNS is a category of social media (Zourou 2012) that Conole and Alevizou (2010) define as 'websites that structure social interaction between members who form subgroups or 'friends'' (11)[10]. Boyd and Ellison (2007) further identify three main features of SNSs:

> *[SNSs] are web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site* (211).

Zourou (2012) mentioned Boyd's (2011) revision of this theory during a presentation at Harvard University. She stated that Boyd adds 'a fourth component, which is the enhancement of peripheral awareness, by allowing users to display temporal patterns of their everyday life' (Zourou 2012: 4). Duffy (2012) presents a similar definition and identifies five distinctive features of SNSs: users are able to (1) create a profile, (2) find peers online, (3) publicly establish connections to other peers, (4) share and use content and (5) form online communities. These features of SNSs add to a collaborative and interactional online environment which is highly applicable to the FLL classroom (Zourou 2012). Not only do these platforms account for UGC and the use and re-use of information, they also foster the (online) identity building of its participants, individually and in group. This group identity fosters foremost the building of a community of practice in which students are comfortable communicating and in which they are able to generate and re-use the information provided by their peers[11].

In order to provide for an extensive overview of the use of SNSs, it is important to define terminology as accurately as possible. Therefore, Boyd and Ellison (2007), and Zourou

[10] For a more elaborate discussion on the ten categories of social media, see Conole & Alevizou (2010).
[11] See 1.3.2 Community building.

(2012) point out that they prefer the use of the term 'social network site', as opposed to 'social networking site'. Boyd and Ellison (2007) argue that both terms are part of public discourse, but that the latter accounts for a more ambiguous interpretation. The authors argue that 'networking' emphasises 'relationship intonation, often between strangers' (211), rather than for users to create and visualise their networks, through which then they can further generate a wide form of communication. They argue that the organisation of these networks originates mainly from and happens within an already existing offline community of practice. This feature is also important for the present study as a community of practice already exists among Ba1 university students. They are therefore already connected through their field of study and the fact that they meet almost every week offline, in class. However, as is pointed out later[12], this does not entail that every student in the project wishes to be part of this community, nor do they all feel comfortable participating in such an environment. Fostering the identity building in this case study, therefore, is also part of the incentives provided to the participants during the project.

In order to grasp the full potential of SNSs and not to oversimplify the technological and ideological features of these Web 2.0 applications, Zourou (2012) points out that there are three distinct key aspects to these formats, summarised by Musser et al. (2007) as 'user participation, openness and network effects' (16). User participation focuses on 'participation leading to re-use' (16), which stands for UGC developed out of several sources and valorised according to the users' needs (Zourou 2012). The author further argues that this practice is indissolubly embedded in the architecture of social media and gives users the opportunity to contribute and play with the data and content at hand. Due to this feature, SNSs are regarded as interactional and communicative platforms which additionally yield content-generation, the use and the re-use of this information provided by the participants. Consequently, this SNS feature is called 'openness'. The term denotes the horizontal and inclusive communication structures these platforms employ. Zourou (2012) points out that these participatory structures motivate users to make contributions and promote interaction. In other words, there is no hierarchy in an open-source communication forum such as the one on Facebook. If there was such a system, it would hamper communication and result in the breakdown of the community of practice.

Finally, to understand the value of SNSs and the potential they have for fostering interaction in the FLL classroom, we have to look at 'network effects':

> *network effects occur when a product or service becomes more valuable as the number of people using it increases* (Musser et al. 2007: 14).

So, by sharing content, replying on other people's contributions, tagging people and creating groups, SNSs can add value to a certain kind of content (14). In terms of language education, this means that the more use and re-use there is of UGC, the more the students are going to be engaged with that generated content. The network effect therefore entails that the more contact the participants have with the target language on the SNS, the more value this platform has for FLL in general. The value of the network effect then is not only a social one, but also an educational one. It could therefore be argued that the social incentives of a Facebook forum could enhance the educational purpose, as the network effect increases as

[12] See 1.3.2 Community building.

certain content is used and re-used by the participants. An open communicative environment with a clear educational incentive forms the basis of this study, as the social character of such a context might enhance the educational one in order to provide an effective collaborative environment outside of the FLL classroom.

For the integration of an SNS in an educational environment, one of the most popular and frequently used SNSs of the past ten years was chosen as the platform to create a peer-to-peer discussion forum, namely Facebook. By reading the company's *mission statement*, it becomes clear that Facebook exemplifies the definition of an SNS according to Boyd and Ellison (2007):

> *Founded in 2004, Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them* (Facebook Newsroom 2014).

With more than 1.23 billion active monthly users as of 31 December 2013, this SNS is the largest social network in the world and is considered the most popular among college students (Godwin-Jones 2010). Together with its communicative character, Facebook appears to be an adequate outset for the project on the educational purpose of SNSs in the FLL classroom.

1.3 Facebook in higher education

1.3.1 The format of Facebook

Besides being a social network, Facebook holds great potential for higher education, in particular to stimulate peer-to-peer communication and peer assessment (Blattner & Fiori 2009; McBride 2009; Reinhardt & Chen 2013; Reinhardt & Zander 2011; Stevenson & Liu 2010). However, due to its social features, Facebook may also be regarded as a social safety net. A Facebook feedback forum could function as an interactional online space where students are able to discuss and ask questions about various educationally and socially related issues. Even when the Facebook forum turns out to serve the purpose of a social safety net only in a university environment, participants would still be influenced positively in their second language acquisition. Gass and Selinker (2001) argue that

> *such use [of a social network site] could instantiate the primary condition that research has shown to encourage L2 acquisition: time spent on meaningfully embedded interaction and negotiation with others* (qtd. in McBride 2009: 40).

By stimulating peer-to-peer communication online, participants are provided with language contact which they would otherwise lack in the FLL classroom. The students are also made aware of their own language use, as well as that of their peers, by engaging with the foreign language online. However, it is important to examine which educational incentives and structures are applicable for Facebook integration in and educational environment.

The focus of the present research is the potential Facebook as an SNS entails to provide an effective peer-to-peer discussion forum with an educational purpose. Previous studies already indicate that the social features of SNSs, in particular their tendency to foster interpersonal communication, enhance the L2 language contact of participants. The educational integration in these studies consists of a task-based approach in which participants were provided with assignments and deadlines which had to guarantee continuous peer-to-peer interaction. This is also the approach of the present case study as no lecturer/tutor is included in the Facebook forum to lower contribution anxiety[13].

Research has also been carried out on two essential features of the use of SNSs in second language learning, namely *second language socialisation* and *interpersonal relationship building* (Carter 2010; Duff 2008, 2012; Thorne 2003; Watson-Gegeo 2004). Language socialisation[14] is a tendency which denotes the creation of a specific community of practice and fosters peer-to-peer interaction. It is argued that due to socialisation the foreign language contact is meaningful as it goes beyond formal educationally led communication in class and adds real-life relevance to the interactions between the participants (Sykes, Oskoz & Thorne 2008). Interpersonal relationship building, furthermore, generates communication as the participants get to know each other, which strengthens the community of practice (Carter 2010). It is also argued that participants, as users of the target language, gain confidence through this tendency as well. It has to be noted, however, that this appears to be the case only when students are able to self-regulate the conversations; so without the presence of a lecturer or tutor who could intervene in the peer-to-peer communication (Carter 2010; Thorne 2013). In other words, when leaving students autonomous, they feel more comfortable to communicate about educationally and socially led content than they do when observed by a lecturer. The present case study excludes the lecturer from the Facebook forum in order to provide a comfortable communication format for the students to experience and produce peer-to-peer communication and to let them build up the community of practice autonomously.

Case studies on Web 2.0 language learning communities (Zourou 2012)[15] such as Livemocha, Babbel and Sharedtalk, have shown that the inclusion of a teacher hampers genuine language use. The main difference between Web 2.0 language learning communities[16] and the educational integration of SNSs lies in the fact that SNSs provide a strong(er) sense of community (Aydin 2012). By creating a strong online community, learners tend to generate higher-level reasoning strategies, a greater diversity of ideas, critical thinking and more creative responses when working together to create and share knowledge (Leidner & Jarvenpaa, 1995). The possibility of grouping people in discussion forums on Facebook also fosters the building of an efficient community of practice (Blattner & Lomicka 2012). The basic building blocks of this interpersonal socialisation on Facebook are user profiles (McBride 2009) which represent a person's appearance to the outer (online)

[13] See 1.3.3 Integration of Facebook in higher education.

[14] 'L2 socialization represents a process by which non-native speakers of a language [...] seek competence in the language and, typically, membership and the ability to participate in the practices of communities in which that language is spoken' (Duff 2008: 1).

[15] Web 2.0 language learning communities are online educational forums which provide a communicative environment for learners of various languages (Zourou 2012). These forums are supervised by a lecturer or tutor.

[16] A more elaborate discussion on Web 2.0 language learning communities can be found in Van Dixhoorn et al. (2010) and Loiseau et al. (2011).

world and, in addition, generate recognition and familiarisation with other members of the community of practice. Through these profiles, participants are able to build interpersonal relationships and communicate with each other directly (via private messaging, chat or comments) and indirectly (via status updates, posts, pictures or videos). The overall communicative approach on SNSs is denoted as *asynchronous communication* (Rovai 2002). Asynchronous communication is the communicative approach which enables participants to talk to each other without immediate turn-taking. They are able to wait before answering a question or commenting on a remark. It furthermore enables the participants to think about their reply. This not only improves their language proficiency, but also makes them aware of their own language use along the way.

In conclusion, the main features which have to be considered when integrating an educationally led Facebook forum are community building, language socialisation and the appropriate educational incentives to foster peer-to-peer communication, provided by a task-based approach. In this way it becomes possible to assess the educational and social purpose of the Facebook forum through an analysis of participants' language use, as well as their attitudes towards the integration of such an environment into an educational context.

1.3.2 Community building

Community building is regarded as a beneficial and even essential feature of effective and successful learning (Bates 1990; Bransford, Brown & Cocking 2003; Jonassen et al. 1995; Palloff & Pratt 2000; Seaton 1993; Selfe & Eilola 1989). McMillan and Chavis (1986) define the sense of community as 'a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together' (9). This feeling of community also entails a feeling of commitment, which fosters student participation. Learning in such environments therefore yields communication and interaction between individuals (Slavin 1996) by generating and sharing knowledge. In order for this approach to be effective, it is essential that participants feel they can communicate openly and they are working towards a common goal or purpose (Thompson & MacDonald 2005). For this reason, a task-based approach was included in the project in order to foster peer-to-peer communication.

Building such communities in an online environment becomes more and more essential as the learning strategies of students entering higher education nowadays includes proficient use of web-based technologies (O'Conner, Mortimer & Bond 2011). In the context of the integration of community building using technological tools in the FLL classroom, Rovai (2002) points out that 'online environments such as SNSs provide learners with a new, stronger feel of community belonging, which ultimately increases the willingness to share information, support each other, and encourage collaborative efforts' (qtd. in Blattner & Lomicka 2012: 5). In other words, peer-to-peer communication as well as peer assessment are encouraged by providing students with an SNS which contributes to their community identity. Kok (2008) holds on to the same argument and adds that SNSs may enhance the spirit, trust, interaction and learning experience among students as a whole. It has to be noted though that these tendencies work only when students have a common goal (Meyer 2004), which is why this project applies a task-based approach to foster peer-to-peer communication. By doing so, students are encouraged to produce educationally led

contributions without adding too much pressure to their online behaviour which would have been the case when a lecturer would have been included to regulate their conversations. When these conditions are fulfilled, the use of SNSs in an educational environment enhances an 'active exchange of ideas' (McBride 2009: 42). Community belonging fosters Musser et al.'s (2007) features of user participation and openness. These two aspects which consider student engagement on the one hand and usability and accessibility of the format on the other, both lead to a stronger network effect. This network effect in an educational environment could be translated into a higher rate of peer-to-peer communication and may have positive effects on the overall learning outcome of the students (Palloff & Pratt 2000).

However, Donath (1998), Preece (2000) and Zourou (2012) point out that the term 'community' is an ambiguous concept, foremost when considering SNSs. They claim that the sense of community does not necessarily entail a high degree of engagement or interaction, and may even provide an incentive for intentionally passive online behaviour. This would be the case when members of the community do not feel accepted, or when the community does not have enough communicative (social or educational) incentives to prevent communication from breaking down. In addition, due to a lack of educational direction or goals in such an online environment, participants may fall back into a more passive use of the format. Zourou (2012) further argues in this perspective, referring to various researchers (Christakis & Fowler 2009; Donath & Boyd 2004; Papacharissi & Easton 2013; Stafone et al. 2011), that SNSs have a 'paradox of scarcity of strong [community] ties in comparison to the abundance of weak [community] ties' (4). This means that, due to a lot of rather superficial social connections, the sense of a strong coherence is not, or not always, present in an SNS community. The potential lack of these strong established social connections between participants results in more participants who will be performing passive engagement and will be 'lurking' (Zourou 2012: 4) at other people's contributions. In this project, providing educational incentives through a task-based approach has to make up for this tendency and has to enhance the feeling of community among the students as it provides them with a common goal: the writing of their writing assignments.

When providing both social and educational incentives, it is important for researchers to be aware of the thin line between community building – involving the social aspect of Facebook as well as that of the students themselves – and the educational context, provided by the educational institution through obligatory assignments. The line between the social and educational aspects of a Facebook forum can easily be crossed and might have a huge impact on the way students perceive their interaction and participation and therefore, the metacognitive strategies they apply. The main goal of the present research is the analysis of the social and educational features of the integrated Facebook forum which will be discussed against the backdrop of overall student participation and language use of the online peer-to-peer communication. Finally, it has to be noted that online interaction between students on an SNS is considered 'authentic interaction' because it resembles spoken language and entails a more social and communicative nature than conversations in the language learning classroom (McBride 2009). Sykes, Oskoz & Thorne (2008) further point out in this case that 'instead of merely simulating other modes of interaction, technology-mediated communication is, in and of itself, the real thing that operates as a critically important medium for all kinds of human interaction' (529). It thus becomes possible to analyse the contributions made by the participants as genuine language use which enables the present

research to gain more insight into online community building, metacognitive strategies and the overall language usage of participants on the Facebook forum.

1.3.3 Integration of Facebook in higher education

Integrating Web 2.0 language learning communities or SNSs in higher education is considered an example of blended learning. Blended learning, however, is hard to define because of the range in systems, approaches and media this entails. Graham (2006) studied the most commonly used definitions of the approach and argues that 'most of the definitions are just variations on a few common themes' (4). He points out that blended learning is defined by combining instructional modalities (or delivery media), combining instructional methods, or combining online and face-to-face instructions in the curriculum of an educational institution. The author considers the first two approaches too general to be regarded as valid definitions. He adopts the following definition:

> *blended learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer mediated instruction* (5).

This definition is the most delineated and, consequently, fits the purpose of this research best. However, for this research, computer-mediated instruction is replaced by the integration of an SNS as an integrated discussion forum where a task-based approach enhances the course content that has been taught during the face-to-face sessions of the course.

In the present case study Facebook is used as the medium to include computer-mediated instruction into the FLL classroom. As the Facebook forum also comprises a social safety net where students can help each other when they experience problems with the university's administration, have questions about deadlines or have remarks about teaching/learning at university in general, it is far easier for them to contact their peers about certain topics than to address the educational or administrative staff. Providing a communicative space where they can discuss these topics and problems, enhances the community feeling, and also provides them with easier access to the administration of the educational institution. This aspect of the Facebook forum enhances the production of genuine language during the conversations. McBride (2009) argues that 'if we can get our FL students to interact socially on SNSs, then they may be engaged in more authentic social and communicative behavior than typically happens in classrooms' (38). The author argues that SNSs have great potential in the active exchange of ideas, which contributes to intellectual development. Moreover, the students are better informed about the university's administrative system and the courses' overall objectives and requirements which have a positive effect on their learning output (Dixon, Kuhlhorst & Reiff 2006; Jonassen et al. 1995; Palloff & Pratt 2000). Lantholf and Thorne (2006) further focus on the educational language learning possibilities of an SNS and consider the context of second-language acquisition as one in which students are to be active learners who are involved in their own FLL process by engaging with other students, using authentic interaction. Nevertheless, there is also scepticism about using technology in the FLL classroom. The most important counter argument is that using SNSs or Web 2.0 language learning communities reduces time for actual instruction in class (Garrison & Kanuka 2004). However, in a blended learning environment, online peer-to-peer

communication together with face-to-face instruction provide a more communicative language learning classroom which enhances student engagement and provides a better learning output for the students (McBride 2009; Meddings and Thornbury 2009; Slavin 1996; Van de Poel 2009). Precisely the aspect of community building provides SNSs with the learning potential that in-class discussions and Web 2.0 language learning communities lack; which is the use and re-use of UGC (Lomicka & Lord 2009; Zourou 2012), and peer-to-peer interaction in a more comfortable and social language learning environment. This all results in more genuine language use of the students' L2 (McBride 2009; Sykes, Oskoz & Thorne 2008; Thorne & Payne 2005; Zourou & Lamy 2013).

Blattner and Lomicka (2012) further elaborate on the added value of Facebook by emphasising that its sense of community building is strengthened by using already existing offline communities of practice. The authors argue that students have the feeling they belong to a group of like-minded people, have an audience to talk to and initiate communication more easily in comparison to other forums or discussion board tools which do not account for these social features. Consequently, when students themselves set up an initiative to share information, this tendency is even more stimulated because of a bottom-up and user-oriented approach (Zourou 2012). This bottom-up communicative approach denotes the tendency that the communicative incentives are provided by the community of practice itself, in this case the peers on the Facebook forum. There are no additional external incentives necessary to prevent communication breakdown or subject-loss in the communicative environment. It is therefore such tendency an educationally led forum should try to entail. The interaction has to be fostered from a bottom-up initiative instead of a top-down, task-based or interaction-conscripted communication incentive. However, an educational incentive is necessary for students to continue communicating about the course content (De Jong et al. 2005; Janssen et al. 2007; Zourou 2012). If not, they would tend immediately to make socially led contributions due to the social features of such a Facebook forum. Therefore, a task-based approach, containing three THAs, was introduced to the project. This top-down approach, however, was the only stimulus from the educational institution that could influence the contributions of the students and so could add pressure to their communication (McBride 2009). No other incentives were provided, nor was a lecturer/tutor present on the Facebook forum to keep contribution anxiety as low as possible. Several case studies also employ a Facebook forum, which is provided by the educational institution to look at how students partake in group discussions (Haverback 2009; Mills 2011; Roblyer et al. 2010). These projects also encountered the problem of stimulating a bottom-up communicative approach to student communication and employed a task-based approach. McBride (2009) points out that the feature of a top-down approach from the educational institution might introduce a feel of 'forcedness' to the students' interaction. Also the obligation to participate and interact with a group of students with whom they may not feel the need to interact with in that educational context – or even socially – may influence this tendency. The author further points out that the social character of a Facebook forum could also create an 'in' and an 'out' crowd among the participants. It is possible that a division occurs between those students who do participate frequently and those who do not. For those who also do not feel as comfortable to make contributions on the Facebook forum, this may 'cause alienation and anxiety in some students, turning those students away from the study of the L2 and its culture' (43). The inclusion of a lecturer/tutor who could mediate the conversations, may form part of a solution, but could put additional pressure on the peer-to-peer communication.

1.3.4 The role of a lecturer/tutor in an SNS forum

Lowering communication pressure is therefore made possible by including a lecturer/tutor in the discussion forum, who could regulate conversation and ensure the sustenance of course-related topics (Boyd 2007; De Pew 2004; McKee 2002). However, including a lecturer/tutor in this kind of social communicative environment has several drawbacks: first, the lecturer/tutor does not have the same experience of the class as the students do (McBride 2009); so they might create a distance between their view of the forum and its communicative purpose, and that of the students. A different point of view that would hamper peer-to-peer communication and add pressure to the conversations. These aspects restrict the genuine language use that is present on such online communication formats. Secondly, Vie (2007) and Mazer, Murphy and Simonds (2007) point out that the inclusion of a lecturer/tutor in such an environment could mean a decrease in their authority. Students may also be able to delve into the lecturer/tutor's personal life. Thirdly, McBride (2009) remarks that students might feel forced to interact with their lecturers/tutors on such a social platform. The fact that the platform keeps a constant written record, does not temper this tendency. The author proposes that lecturer/tutor plays the role of observer. This way, students do feel they are being monitored and therefore will contribute useful content in the educational context, while they do not have to interact with the lecturers/tutors themselves.

The present case study consists of a blended learning environment where face-to-face instruction and online peer-to-peer communication are both part of the curriculum. However, the lecturer/tutor is neither included in the Facebook forum the students had to join for the Ba1 course of *All Write* (writing component of *English proficiency 1*) as a participant, nor as an observer. To reduce the pressure on the students, as well as feeling forced to contribute, a Master student in *English Literature and Language* was appointed administrator (admin) of the discussion forum in place of a lecturer/tutor. He was tasked to observe the conversations, but never to interfere into the peer-to-peer interaction as this might influence the genuine language use of the participants in the online language learning environment. This genuine language use has to be generated in order to provide a reliable and useful corpus to analyse the foreign language use of the participants, the generated content, as well as the educational and social character of the Facebook forum.

2. EFL case study

2.1 The Facebook forum: an online communicative environment

This case study performs an enquiry into the integration of SNSs in the educational setting of the Ba1 university classroom. The SNS chosen for in this study is Facebook. Its global nature, its high number of users and its tendency to foster interaction in general (Aydin 2012) renders this SNS the most suitable for the purpose of providing a peer-to-peer communication forum in the language learning classroom. In addition to being a communicative format, the Facebook forum can also provide an online social safety net for students to help each other with questions and problems which are not course-related (Mills 2011). The format encourages various exchanges of knowledge and enables students to form a strong interconnected community (Aydin 2012).

The purpose of this case study is to look at what the function of a Facebook forum can be in a blended learning context when it entails both social and educational incentives. The present study enquires how English as a foreign language, in particular, is put into use and how, consequently, the overall interactions evolve when students are confronted with formal, educationally led communication in an informal, online environment. The metacognitive strategies the students apply during their peer-to-peer communication (Flavell 1979) also form part of the study. These strategies entail three main features, as they gauge (1) to what extent students are aware of their own knowledge, which consists of their knowledge on what kind of content they have contribute and on how to do so, (2) to what extent they are aware of why they have to contribute information, and (3) to what extent are they aware of the purpose and possible added educational value of such a peer-to-peer communication forum (Schraw 1998). Part of this enquiry therefore focuses on students' perceived self-efficacy: 'perceived self-efficacy is concerned with judgements of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations' (Bandura 1982). In the present study, self-efficacy denotes the metacognitive strategy of to what extent students are aware of how they have to contribute the appropriate content due to the task-based approach in the Facebook forum. In the perspective of the project, perceived self-efficacy also indicates to what extent students are aware of the character of the forum, as it denotes 'the methods through which students regulate their own motivation and academic learning' (Zimmerman & Bandura 1994). Perceived self-efficacy is primarily gauged by analysing students' responses to two questionnaires in which they indicated what their gain in skill and knowledge was due to the forum and how they perceived their own participation, as well as that of their peers. This part of the study therefore employs findings from the students' self-perception (Bandura 1986).

The project was integrated into the writing component (*All Write*) of the *English proficiency 1* course at the University of Antwerp (Belgium) during the first semester of the school year of 2013-2014. The course is compulsory for the Ba1 students who are enrolled in the Bachelor degree of *Language and Literature - English*, at the university. The course of *All Write* focuses on English proficiency and literacy, as well as on textual understanding in an academic context. The course description is as follows:

English Proficiency 1 – Writing

The writing course is designed to introduce the basic principles and conventions of reading and writing in an academic context. An academic context' here refers to university – an environment dedicated to higher learning. This environment has specific expectations and conventions for reading and writing; this course aims to help its users meet them. The course book All Write *will show you how course information can be processed and how this information and your own opinions can be coherently presented to an academic audience. The materials are based on more than 200 exams and 600 papers and essays. The approach is reading-based writing. After each contact session you will be invited to do a series of reflection and reinforcement exercises on the university's learning platform Blackboard through which not only your language awareness will be augmented, but also the insight in your own learning process will grow.*

All All Write contact sessions take place in the first term (before the first exam and the first writing assignments).

(Van De Poel & Gasiorek 2007: 9-12)

2.1.1 Online communication through Blackboard

As mentioned in the course description, the University of Antwerp provides students with an online educational and communicative format called 'Blackboard Learn 9.1'. This platform is employed by several educational institutions and is used for online communication between the educational institution and the students. The communication consists of an email platform, an announcement board, a download and upload zone for assignments, presentations and other course material. It also provides an overall administrative centre for the students, where they can check examination schedules, syllabuses and other administrative announcements. Blackboard also provides a space where exercises can be completed, assignments can be uploaded and drafts can be revised. The platform therefore accounts for an active student participation and provides an online environment where students can engage with the course content. However, while different components of the Blackboard format enable students to practise and exercise their newly acquired knowledge, the format does not account for a better language understanding or acquisition when peer-to-peer interaction and communication are concerned. The format mainly is a one-way street communicatively, focusing on tutor-student communication instead of peer-to-peer communication. Although Blackboard has a forum on which students and the educational staff can post questions and engage in discussions, these kinds of forum do not spark interaction, nor are they frequently used by the students to perform peer-to-peer communication (Schroeder & Greenbowe 2009). The reason for this can be found in the old-fashioned design of such forums. Subjects are anchored per topic, so no dynamic interaction is possible (Van der Pol et al. 2006). Furthermore, several 'clicks' are required in order to reach the essence of a discussion or a particular question. In addition, the forum is embedded in the university's online format (Blackboard) which accounts for tutor-student communication and so adds a high face value to the concept (McBride 2009). The presence of a lecturer/tutor neither encourages student participation in online discussions nor does it

foster peer-to-peer communication about certain courses or course topics. These features all hamper genuine language use and prevent open communication. Thompson and MacDonald (2005) argue that it is essential for a group of participants to feel they can communicate openly and are able to work together towards a common goal or purpose. A Facebook forum should lower the threshold for students to participate in educationally led online interaction and should account for more open discussions than the formal online environment of Blackboard (Boyd & Ellison 2008; Eryilmaz et al. 2013; McBride 2009). However, it is certainly necessary to make the distinction between communication between tutors/the educational institution and students, on the one hand, and peer-to-peer communication, on the other. Both methods of communication serve a different purpose in an educational environment. This distinction mainly entails a difference in target audience, a different communication pattern and a different level of face value which is attached to the used format. Blackboard, on the one hand, accounts clearly for a more formal environment; an environment which is established by the educational institution, focusing on informing students and providing them with a service hatch for exercises and assignments. Blackboard is therefore an educational format with a top-down communicative approach (Lamy & Goodfellow 2010); students sign in, retrieve information and upload no more content than is required from them. The instruction to do so always comes from the (members of the) educational institution. Therefore, peer-to-peer communication is scarce on the integrated Blackboard forum. Not only do the students dislike the old format, the environment in which it is embedded also raises their awareness that this forum is institution-based. The result is that all their contributions could be evaluated (Kimmerle & Cress 2008) and might influence their own face value towards the educational staff or might have a positive or negative effect on their overall grades.

Facebook, on the other hand, entails social features more than educational ones. Integrating the format into an educational environment might lower the threshold for peer-to-peer communication. When the educational institution and a lecturer/tutor are not present in such an environment, the evaluative pressure on their contributions consequently lowers. This is mostly because the students themselves become the main supervisors and assessors of the contributions made in the Facebook group (Kimmerle & Cress 2008). This gives them a feel of autonomy and of security (Zourou 2012). Students themselves mostly refer to this feeling of social safety as being able to ask their peers ‘stupid questions’, rather than suffering face loss in front of the educational staff. A Facebook forum, therefore, accounts for a more open communication than a Blackboard forum. Besides the absence of an evaluative ‘big brother’, Facebook provides an online environment where student autonomy fosters a more bottom-up communicative approach (Zourou 2012), despite the educational incentives provided by the educational institution.

2.1.2 Set-up EFL case study

The case study is divided into a quantitative and a qualitative section. The quantitative approach is an analysis of the statistical data on participants’ use of language retrieved from the Facebook forum. The qualitative approach consists of two questionnaires in which students were asked to give general personal information as well as their opinion on various statements about the use of Facebook in an educational environment. The personal information was used to create an accurate participant overview and to establish how dense

and homogenous the group of participants actually was. As McBride (2009) argues, it may not be sufficient for a group of students to take up the same courses in order to form a homogenous group. This aspect of homogeneity facilitates peer-to-peer communication as students feel more connected to the other participants and form a stronger community (Palloff & Pratt 2010). This aspect stimulates the learning curve as well-founded social and personal liaisons between participants – what Zourou (2012) calls 'strong ties' – do account for more efficient communication, student motivation and engagement in the project. In addition to their personal information, participants were also asked to describe their use of SNSs in general, and give their opinion on the use of Facebook in an educational context. This aspect of the questionnaires comprised yes/no-questions, tick-off lists and open questions. All questions had a comment section in which the participants could add their personal opinion. Lastly, the questionnaires also contained three questions on the integration of Facebook in an educational environment and focused on the students' attitudes towards a more top-down approach. The questions focused on the role of the student in such an environment, the additional role of a lecturer/tutor and the role of the educational institution in this perspective.

The Facebook group installed in the FLL classroom was called the *All Write Solidarity Forum* (further referred to as the *AW Facebook forum*). The name was derived from other, pre-existing forums on Facebook which account for peer-to-peer communication and peer-to-peer problem-solving. These forums are all created and managed by students themselves and so function as an autonomous, educationally led communication forum with a bottom-up communicative approach. The most popular Facebook forum for students at the University of Antwerp in *Language & Literature* is the *Solidarity Group Language and Literature Antwerp* (*Solidariteitsgroep Taal- en Letterkunde Antwerpen*) and has more than 1,200 members. Other similar groups are the *Bachelor English Support Group* (*Bachelor Engels Hulpgroep*) with more than 350 members and the *Support Group for TFL*[17] (*Hulpgroep TFL*) with more than 250 members. Smaller groups for specific courses, or groups focusing on a specific graduation year also occur in the Facebook environment, such as the *BA1 Applied Linguistics 2013-2014* group (*BA1 Toegepaste Taalkunde 2013-2014*) or the group *Science Skills 2013-2014* (*Wetenschappelijke Vaardigheden 2013-2014*). These different Facebook groups all serve different purposes and are tailored to the specific wants and needs of the students and the curriculum. In that perspective, the *Solidarity Group Language and Literature Antwerp* provides a broad spectrum of education-related topics and discussions, ranging from administrative to course-specific content. The main purpose of the *Science Skills 2013-2014* group is to provide students with a support network for their individual assignments for the Ba2 course of *Science Skills* at the university. The tendency of creating Facebook forums is visible not only at the University of Antwerp, as other educational institutions also have these kinds of support groups. Students at Ghent University (Belgium), for example, have created the *1 Ba Language and Literature Ughent English* group (*1 Ba Taal- & Letterkunde Ugent Engels).* Students at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) have created the *All the world's a facebook page. Students of English @ CULouvain* (*All the world's a facebook page. Studenten Engels @ KULeuven*). These forums yield educationally relevant discussions using a bottom-up approach. As the AW Facebook forum is created and managed by the educational institution, it is hard to imitate this tendency. However, it is possible to reduce the contribution pressure as much as possible by

[17] The study option Theatre, Film and Literature Studies at the University of Antwerp.

excluding a lecturer/tutor from the forum. This is also the case with all the other student-managed forums and it is clear that these forums contain mostly educationally led communication even though no member of the educational staff is present. To ensure specific educationally led communication concerning one specific course (*All Write*), nevertheless, requires an educational incentive. The task-based approach which is applied in this specific Facebook forum has to account for topic-related discussions, as well as for the prevention of communication breakdown. When looking at the conversations on the student-managed online forums, it becomes clear that students themselves take up the role of the tutor or mentor by providing answers and additional information to those students who ask for help. It is interesting to see if students will perform the same actions in a Facebook group with an educational incentive such as the Facebook forum in the present research.

In order for the AW Facebook forum to be successful in the language learning classroom, it has to have an educational incentive. The forum is designed for a blended learning environment, where face-to-face instruction, online exercises and social interaction enhance each other and provide a better learning outcome (Dixon, Kuhlhorst & Reiff 2006; Garrison et al. 2001). This learning outcome is the result of an interactive peer-to-peer learning mechanism which enables students to discuss and ask questions about their newly acquired knowledge in class. Furthermore, they are able to deliberate on their assignments and provide each other with a system of peer review outside of the classroom. Together with this educational purpose, the Facebook forum could also serve as a social safety net which accounts for a more 'comfortable' way for students to share new experiences at university, discuss course material and assist one another with administrative problems or non-course-related questions. This kind of online peer-to-peer interaction is more comfortable for students than discussing these issues in class, be it with their peers or with the educational staff, because, on the one hand, they are able to share the knowledge they themselves have acquired with their peers on the Facebook forum (which Stahl & Hesse (2009) call 'shared knowledge'), and, on the other hand, they do so in an linguistically unrestricted social environment (Liu et al. 2013; Gruba & Clark 2013). Stahl and Hesse (2009) refer to this tendency as 'successful collaboration or collaborative learning [which] involves the construction of new knowledge, created jointly and thereby shared by the participants' (365). The aspect of shared knowledge therefore makes a Facebook forum more successful than a Blackboard forum. Moreover, Facebook also provides students with an additional social platform on which they can establish new social relationships with their classmates. This increases social cohesion in the community of practice and provides better peer-to-peer interaction and information flow (McBride 2009; Reinhardt & Chen 2013; Reinhardt & Zander 2011; Stevenson & Liu 2010; Slavin 1996). Nevertheless, McBride (2009) also points out that there are downsides to this approach. The social character of Facebook may in itself discourage students from participating; they may feel threatened by other students, feel violated in their online social life or feel forced to contribute to the educationally led discussions on an online platform. It is necessary to investigate what students' attitudes are towards the use of the AW Facebook forum in general and also to look at how they experience this kind of peer-to-peer interaction in order to be able to assess their perceived self-efficacy and feeling of comfort when participating in the forum.

2.1.3 Face-to-face instruction: English proficiency 1 – All Write

The course of *All Write*, in which the Facebook forum was used, consists of 12 face-to-face contact hours (of 50 minutes), additional tasks, exercises and THAs. The THAs are monthly assignments developed and adapted for the purpose of this study by Kris Van de Poel (lecturer) and Ward Peeters (MA student), and consist of an individual writing component and an additional critical discussion about debatable language points, linguistic problems or writing experiences that students had to perform online. The THAs were especially designed to fit the blended learning environment and to spark interaction on the AW Facebook forum. Their own insights and questions, which originated from the writing components of the THAs, served as the starting point for discussions and conversations. In addition, the participants were also asked to comment at least once on other students' contributions. These reflective tasks were included into the THA description to ensure peer-to-peer communication and to make students aware of the additional value of the discussion forum[18]. In order to decrease the pressure on the students, no additional deadlines were set for their online contributions apart from the THA deadlines, nor would their participation on the Facebook forum be graded or have any influence on their final grade for the course of *All Write*[19].

At the beginning of the course, MA student, Ward Peeters, gave a 30-minute presentation about the benefits of peer-to-peer learning and the integration of the AW Facebook forum into the course of *All Write*. The forum was presented as a collaborative environment to improve students' language acquisition and writing skills, to stimulate peer-to-peer communication, and to make students aware of the importance of critical analysis concerning their own writing, as well as that of their peers. The importance of these features of writing in an academic context were explained thoroughly and were described as part of a thesis project on blended learning, where face-to-face instruction and an online support system would be integrated. The students were additionally encouraged to participate in the Facebook project. The first (pre-)questionnaire was also filled in by the students during the course hour. Via Blackboard, the students were provided with an URL-address[20], linking them to the Facebook forum they had to join after class. They were informed that Ward Peeters would be the admin of the forum, but that he would, by no means, interfere in their conversations. To assess the influence of the presence of the MA student in the Facebook group, the post-questionnaire contained a question about the attitude towards the educational staff in general and his presence in particular[21]. It was made clear that the course lecturer (Prof. Dr. Kris Van de Poel) would not take part in the Facebook forum, nor would she know anything about the content of the contributions on the format. This was emphasised during the presentation in order to simulate a more bottom-up communicative approach and to lower contribution anxiety. The students had to have the feeling they were autonomous in what they contributed, which excludes the potential influence of the presence of members of the educational staff. Only then, their contributions could be regarded as authentic online communication or genuine language use.

[18] This educational incentive, or task-based approach, is needed in order to spark peer-to-peer communication and fire up discussion (McBride 2009; Olson & Olson 2000), although it could hamper the bottom-up communicative approach (Zourou 2012).
[19] For an extensive overview on the THAs, see appendix: THA1, THA2, THA3.
[20] URL address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/194914180692862/
[21] See 4.3.2 The absence of a lecturer/tutor and 4.3.3 The role of the educational institution.

This set-up is a different approach to most other blended learning projects, which use SNSs or Web 2.0 language learning communities in their curriculum; foremost because the format is an initiative of the educational institution but excludes a teacher from the project. The teacher is replaced by an MA student who does not interfere, but monitors the students' contributions. It is interesting to investigate how students cope with this kind of environment, where assignments are part of their online experience and they have to contribute educationally led communication in an informal online environment without the presence of a teacher. Consequently, these features create the corpus from which the social and educational features of the Facebook forum can be assessed, together with the other enquiries of the study which provide further insight into the effect of the forum on the students and their peer-to-peer communication.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Participants

This case study focuses on a particular population of interest, namely, Ba1 university students of *English Language and Literature*[22]. The first-year majors all are enrolled at the University of Antwerp and learn English as a foreign language. The sample of students was taken from the course of *All Write* (writing component of *English Proficiency 1*), a compulsory academic writing course. Students are all non-native speakers of English and take up two languages in their Bachelor's degree (English, Dutch, German, French and Spanish), as is required by the university's curriculum. All of the 123 participants are native speakers of Dutch. Two participants are native speakers of French and one participant is a native speaker of Berber, these three participants were excluded from the analyses as later on in this study the fallback into the students' L1 (Dutch) is gauged. Excluding these three students from the target group is necessary in order to create an unbiased corpus containing the contributions made on the AW Facebook forum.

Apart from the project on Facebook, which provided the corpus for the quantitative data analysis, the study consists of two qualitative components: a pre-questionnaire and a post-questionnaire. In the pre-questionnaire students were asked to fill in a paper version of the questionnaire during course hours. The post-questionnaire was an online questionnaire in MS-Word which the students had to fill in at home and upload to a Blackboard upload zone. The pre-questionnaire was taken before the project was introduced. The students were not given any instruction beforehand, apart from the introductory paragraph on the questionnaires themselves[23]. The post-questionnaire was taken before the end of the course, after the last THA was to be submitted. A distinction was made between Facebook users and a non-Facebook users. Both groups received the same questionnaires, but the non-Facebook users had to fill in a shortened, adapted version. The pre-questionnaire sample consists of 120 students. One girl took up the course of *All Write* as an elective in her Bachelor's degree of Dutch-TFL and is excluded from the study because she is not a student of *English Language and Literature* and so does not study English as a foreign language. From the 119 participants in the pre-questionnaire, 112 already had a Facebook account, whereas seven did

[22] Also referred to as *first-year English majors* at the University of Antwerp.
[23] For the entire questionnaires: see appendix 2: questionnaires.

not. For the evaluation of the students' attitudes towards the use of SNSs in general, as well as in an educational environment, both groups were asked the same questions (users: *n* = 112, non-users: *n* = 7). Students' attitudes toward the use of Facebook in general, as well as in an educational environment, are derived from the responses of the Facebook users only (*n* = 112), as no one of the non-Facebook users had created a specific Facebook account in order to participate in the project, nor were they generally familiar with the use of Facebook.

The post-questionnaire sample consists of 121 students. One girl took up the course of *All Write* as an elective in her Bachelor's degree of Dutch-TFL. Therefore she is again excluded from the study as she does not study English as a foreign language. From the 120 participants in the post-questionnaire, 119 had a Facebook account and participated on the Facebook forum, while one did not. For the evaluation of students' attitudes toward the use of SNSs in an educational environment, both groups were asked the same questions (users: *n* = 119, non-users: *n* = 1). Students' attitudes toward the use of the AW Facebook forum, in particular, are derived from the responses of the Facebook users only (*n* = 119). Owing to the small number of non-Facebook users, their responses are not significant. However, it is interesting to see how their opinion on the topic differs or corresponds with that of the Facebook users. The majority of students who had an existing Facebook account, had had one for more than two years (86.6%), while many of the remaining Facebook users had had their account for between one and two years (8.9%). More than half of the Facebook users (52.3%) were also active on other social media, from which Twitter (63.8%), Tumblr (51.7%) and Instagram (41.4%) are most popular. It is safe to infer that a majority of the Facebook users are experienced in their use of the SNS. The fact that more than three-quarters of them check their Facebook profile about ten times a day (20.7% > 10 times/day, 55.0% between 2 and 10 times/day) supports this argument. They use Facebook mainly for chatting and private messaging (91.8%), watching and posting photos (79.1%) and school-related activities (76.4%). School-related activities can be further defined as participating in school-related discussions, as a vast majority of them (83.0%) indicate that they are members of school-related discussion forums.

The age of the participants ranges between 16 and 31 years old (86.3% range between 18 and 21 years old, 90.6% range between 17 and 21 years old). Three-quarters of the participants are female (74.6%), and a quarter are male (25.4%). There are no significant age differences between male and female. All participants study in *Ba1 English Language and Literature* and study one additional language or the option TFL. Half of the students study English-TFL (50.4%), a quarter combines English and Dutch (26.9%) and the other quarter are divided (in decreasing order) into English-Spanish (9.2%), English-French (7.6%) and English-German (5.9%)[24]. The community of practice of the Facebook project could therefore be considered as rather homogeneous, as the age of most of them ranges from between 18 and 21 years old, they are mostly female and they all study English as a foreign language. Nevertheless, as Zourou (2012) has pointed out, these features neither fully account for effective language socialisation, nor for efficient peer-to-peer communication. Therefore the task-based approach, containing three THAs, was introduced to the project. By demanding that they provide comments and additional information to their peers, this task-based approach intends to foster language socialisation, as well as community building (Palloff & Pratt 2000) during the process of the Facebook project.

[24] For a detailed overview on the composition of the student group: see appendix 3: Participants.

2.2.2 Data collection

The data analysed in this case study serve the purpose of looking into the educational purpose of the AW Facebook forum and at the social and educational character of the project. The quantitative data provide an insight into the evolution of participants' language use in the online environment as well as their participation and engagement. Further research and the enquiry into the qualitative data (students' attitudes) are considered against the backdrop of this quantitative analysis. The quantitative data consist of the individual contributions of the participants on the Facebook forum (post and comments) and were retrieved using a Graph API explorer on the developer's page of the Facebook company[25]. The API proxy provides access to the content of a given group to which an individual is administered as an admin (full access) or as a participant (limited access). The API proxy applies the individual Facebook account as access point in order to determine a person's function within a given group or page. It is not possible to retrieve any information from a Facebook group or page when a person is not legitimised to any rights over that particular online area. All contributions were retrieved from the Facebook group and stored into an MS Excel file for further processing.

The second part of this research is an enquiry into the qualitative data. The qualitative data consist of the information retrieved from the pre- and post-questionnaires. The pre-questionnaire was submitted before the start of the project and the post-questionnaire was submitted just before the deadline of the last THA. In the pre-questionnaire, the participants were asked to give their personal opinion on SNS use in general, as well as on the integration of SNSs in an educational environment. In the post-questionnaire, the participants were asked to give their personal opinion on the use of the AW Facebook forum during the course of *All Write*, and on the effect of the online peer-to-peer communication on their THAs. The students' attitudes towards the use of this format are found to be essential in understanding the tendencies which are analysed in the quantitative data. These insights provide a better understanding of the language use of the participants, as well as of the overall organisation and content of the peer-to-peer communication. Consequently, these tendencies provide further insight into the social and educational features of the AW Facebook forum and the metacognitive strategies the participants apply. Students' attitudes towards their own contributions and those of their peers, the presence of a lecturer/tutor in such an online environment, the role of the educational institution, and their opinion about the overall learning outcome of the Facebook forum, are also taken into account. These features provide further insight into the educational value of the AW Facebook forum through the perspective of the students and it gauges to what extent students are aware of their own gain in writing skills and knowledge[26]. Their perceived self-efficacy so sheds more light on their attitude towards the integration of such an online environment into the FLL classroom.

[25] Online available at: https://developers.facebook.com/.

[26] Features which all fit into the perspective of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura 1982), see 2.1 The Facebook forum: an online communicative environment.

3. Quantitative analysis: student participation and language use on the Facebook forum

The corpus of this case study consists of 4,278 contributions made by 126 individual EFL students. 'Contributions' is the term that denotes the posts and comments participants have made between 24 October 2013 and 17 February 2014 on the AW Facebook forum[27]. The forum went online on 24 October 2013 and at this time the students were provided with the URL address so they could join the project. The project ended on 17 February 2014, this was the day that all participants consequently were excluded from the group. All students were excluded because by doing so, the written record of the forum could not be altered and so would provide a durable and reliable corpus.

In order to be able to analyse the social and educational character of the students' contributions, it is necessary to calculate student participation on the AW Facebook forum, as well as to measure their evolution in language use longitudinally. This way it is possible to look at their communicative strategies, or in other words, at their way of communication. In order to make these calculations longitudinal, the corpus is subdivided into four sections. These sections are categorised according to the deadlines of the three THAs. The first section (ASS1) ran from 24 October 2013 to 4 November 2013 and consists of the contributions made during the first THA. The second section (ASS2) ran from 5 November 2013 to 2 December 2013 and consists of the contributions made during the second THA. The third section (ASS3) ran from 3 December 2013 to 6 January 2014 and consists of the contributions made during the third and last THA. The fourth section (POST-ASS) represents the time in which the AW Facebook forum was still online and used by the students, but also in which the course of *All Write* did not entail any further THAs. The THAs formed the main stimulus for the students to contribute any educationally led content, so comparing the POST-ASS phase with the three THA phases might shed more light on the possible influence of the social and educational features of the format on participants' language use and, consequently, on their manner of contributing knowledge and information. The POST-ASS phase, characterised by the absence of an educational incentive, is a viable comparative factor to analyse overall contribution ratios and an additional systematic component to evaluate the evolution of student engagement[28]. The POST-ASS phase ran from 7 January 2014 to 17 February 2014 and consists of the contributions made without the educational impetus of the THAs. Subdividing the quantitative data of this case study this way, consequently, results in three THA phases (ASS1, ASS2 & ASS3) and one post-THA phase (POST-ASS). This division is essential as it is possible to make an analysis of the contribution ratio and the language evolution of the participants in the project across the three THA phases, which entail the same variables and are educationally sustained, while later comparing them to the POST-THA phase. A factor that could trigger a change in language use and interactional patters during the three THA phases is the possibility that students experience the social and educational features of the Facebook format in a different way across a certain period of time. This would entail a shift in perceived self-efficacy (Bandura 1986) as students might alter their method of contributing educationally led

[27] Which equals 117 days, or approximately four months.

[28] This is foremost the case as the POST-ASS phase entails a shift in social and educational incentives; features which have considerable influence on the communicative strategies of the participants.

content to the forum, and so has an impact on their metacognitive strategy of 'knowledge of cognition' (Schraw 1998)[29]. The division provides an overview of the language features when the educational incentive is taken out of the project during the POST-ASS phase. Therefore, on the one hand, it is possible to analyse the linguistic behaviour of participants when they are confronted with educationally led interaction in an informal online environment longitudinally[30], and, on the other hand, it is possible to compare these numbers with a phase of peer-to-peer interaction on the same online environment, but without the educational sustenance of the THAs. All contributions of the three THA phases were assessed and analysed. The three phases lasted approximately three months in which participants were to complete three different THAs and were asked to share their experiences, questions and debatable language points about their individual writing assignments on the online discussion forum. The description that required the additional contributions on the AW Facebook forum as part of the task-based approach was not altered across the three THAs and therefore does not form an interchangeable variable in the project. In addition, all contributions of the POST-ASS phase were analysed according to the same parameters. The three initial THA phases form the main point of interest in this case study. The findings on this part of the project are compared to the figures of the POST-ASS phase in order to create a more exhaustive overview of the evolution participants' contribution ratio, language use, and attitudes towards the use and the function of the AW Facebook forum undergo when the educational incentive is taken out of the project. This makes it possible to gauge their perceived self-efficacy and to look at a possible shift in their metacognitive strategies due to a change in the educational or social character of the project.

3.1 Contribution rate

The contribution rate[31] in this case study denotes the number of contributions participants made during the different sections of the project. The numbers are, on the one hand, considered as the total number of contributions per THA phase and, on the other hand, as the number of daily contributions per phase. These two perspectives provide a different demographic as there is a difference in duration across the three THA phases. The time span of ASS1 (12 days) is considerably shorter than those of ASS2 (28 days) and ASS3 (35 days). This variable originated from the time frame of the *All Write* course. Due to the particular time frame, holidays and other schedules of the educational institution, it was not possible to organise the THAs in such a way that they would cover equal time spans. This variable of time was always taken into account when calculating the statistics and comparing the numbers of the quantitative analysis. However, considering the specific enquiry into the contribution ratio of the overall project, this variable did not have any impact on the number of contributions the participants made during each of the three THA phases on the Facebook

[29] Which entails to what extent they are aware of how to contribute knowledge to the AW Facebook forum.

[30] Which entails the educational and social character of the AW Facebook forum, as it consists of both social and educational incentives.

[31] Contribution rates are gauged in order to determine the students' participation pattern on the AW Facebook forum. Breen and Goldthorpe (1997) and Fullarton et al. (2003) argue that a high participation rate increases positive learning outcomes, but also that contribution rates might change depending on the environment of the classroom. A shift in the educational or social character of the AW Facebook forum therefore might also account for this tendency. So if any evolution is noticeable, it might indicate that there has been a shift in the social or educational character of the project.

forum. When looking at the different ratios, ASS1 consists of 822 contributions over a period of 12 days, which means that around 69 contributions were made each day. Of these contributions, 167 (approximately 20%) were posts and 656 were comments. ASS2 consists of 753 contributions over a period of 28 days, which means that around 27 contributions were made each day. Of these contributions, 156 (approximately 20%) were posts and 597 were comments. Finally, ASS3 consists of 780 contributions over a period of 35 days, which means that approximately 21 contributions were made each day. Of these contributions, 162 (approximately 20%) were posts and 618 were comments. The fact that there were more contributions made on a daily basis during the first part of the project (ASS1), could be ascribed to the fact that the period in which the participants had to complete the first THA (12 days) was much shorter than those of the following two THAs (28 and 35 days respectively). However, when considering these numbers, a distinct observation can be made: although the time span of ASS1 was around one-third of that of the other two THA phases, the number of contributions did not decrease at all. The number of overall contributions even surpassed the number of contributions of the other two following THA phases. It is therefore not necessary to consider the different time spans of the THA phases as a variable across the project as it did not considerably influence the contribution rates of any given THA phase. On the contrary, there were no considerable differences in overall contribution rate noticeable, except for a slightly higher contribution rate during ASS1[32]. The first explanation for this phenomenon can be found in the set-up of the THAs; the description of the three assignments required the same interactive contributions about the individual writing assignments, linked to the course content, of a fixed number of students. It might be the case that students are not influenced by the time frame as much as one would think[33], and that they contribute and interact on the same scale as they would have when given more time to do so[34]. Another factor that could play a role in the consistent number of contributions over the variable time spans of the three THA phases, is the fact that, despite the shorter time frame of ASS1, students were just introduced to the project and they might have had a couple of questions about the course, its structure and its content beforehand. This would also explain the fact that there were a slightly higher number of contributions during ASS1 than during ASS2 or ASS3. They could also be more encouraged to contribute because it was the beginning of the semester of their first year at university; this means that they tend to exchange experiences and questions more often than students who would already be used to that particular environment, as there are indications that their perceived self-efficacy usually renders them more experienced after they have acculturated to the university environment (Van de Poel & Gasiorek 2012). Therefore, at the beginning of the project, they would still be motivated to cooperate. So, even though they had less time to interact during ASS1, they would have had more to talk about. An additional factor is that after a while, during ASS2 and ASS3, when students post questions about their writing assignments, the course of *All Write* or life at university in general, a number of them have already been asked before.

[32] What does have to be noted is the fact that the different time frames had an effect on student participation, as the students contributed more information on a daily basis during ASS1 than in ASS2 or ASS3. The shorter time frame thus seemed to have influenced their participation ratio. Nevertheless, the mean contribution ratios across the three THA phases did not vary to such an extent that it is representative for a shift in educational or social communicative purpose of the project, as students seem to participate on the same level as in ASS2 and ASS3.

[33] The time frames considered here go from approximately one week up to three weeks, in accordance with the time spans of the different THA periods. Furthermore, the specific online communicative environment as the context of this theory also has to be taken into account.

[34] This argument is discussed further in 3.2 Contribution demographic.

Because the AW Facebook forum keeps a written record, students can link their responses to those discussions or can simply look up previous conversations instead of posting the same question over and over again. Facebook provides a communicative system which places previously made conversations back on top of the main page when they are commented upon, so students have quicker access to this information. This would explain why the number of contributions is slightly higher during ASS1 than during ASS2 and ASS3, despite the fact that they had less time to contribute. Lastly, it could be considered that the pressure to contribute was higher during ASS1 due to the shorter time frame. The deadline so may have motivated the student to contribute more and do so quicker than in the other two THA phases[35].

Considering their online participation on the AW Facebook forum, all 126 students posted or commented at least once. It has to be noted, though, that during each of the three THA phases, approximately 20% of the students did not make any contributions at all and, consequently, did not partake in the group discussions. This provides an indication that some students do participate more often than others in the online project[36].

During the fourth part of the project (POST-ASS), in which there was no longer an educational incentive, the students performed 1923 contributions over a period of 42 days. This means that about 46 contributions were made each day. Of these contributions, 164 (approximately 9%) were posts and 1759 were comments. It already has been noted that the number of the contributions did not change substantially over the three THA phases; nevertheless, a notable distinction can be observed when considering the number of contributions made during the POST-ASS phase. The number of contributions more than doubled during this last phase of the project[37].

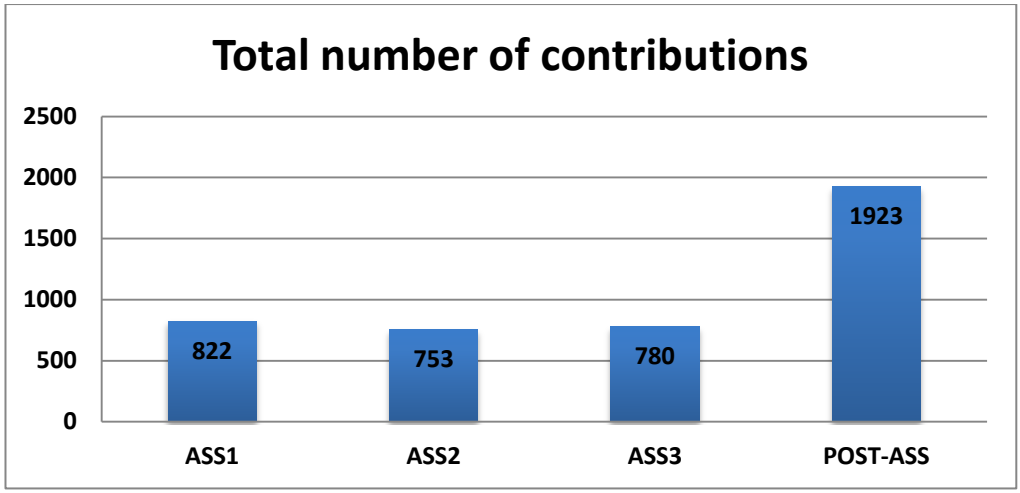


Table 1: Total number of contributions across the four phases of the project

During the POST-ASS phase, a significant change in the number of contributions occurred as the rate went up by more than a thousand contributions. This evolution indicates that there

[35] This argument is discussed further in 3.2 Contribution demographic.
[36] Individual participation rates have to shed more light on this but are not included in the case study, as the focus of this section of the research is to look at the communicative strategies of the community of students instead of the individual participants.
[37] See Table 1.

has been a shift in the communicative strategy the participants applied during the last phase of the project. This tendency becomes even clearer when looking at the mean rate of the number of contributions. The mean rate of contributions per phase clarifies the fact that the POST-ASS phase consists of more than double the number of contributions than the other three THA phases[38]. Considering the time span, the POST-ASS phase lasted 42 days, which is seven days longer than ASS3. However, while the contribution rate is more than double the number of the previous phase (ASS3), the POST-ASS phase did not take up double the time span. This tendency could already be noticed when comparing the contribution ratios of ASS1 with the other two THA phases. It could therefore be argued that the time span in which the students had to complete their assignment did not have any notable impact on their engagement in the project, however, a shift in social and educational incentives did.

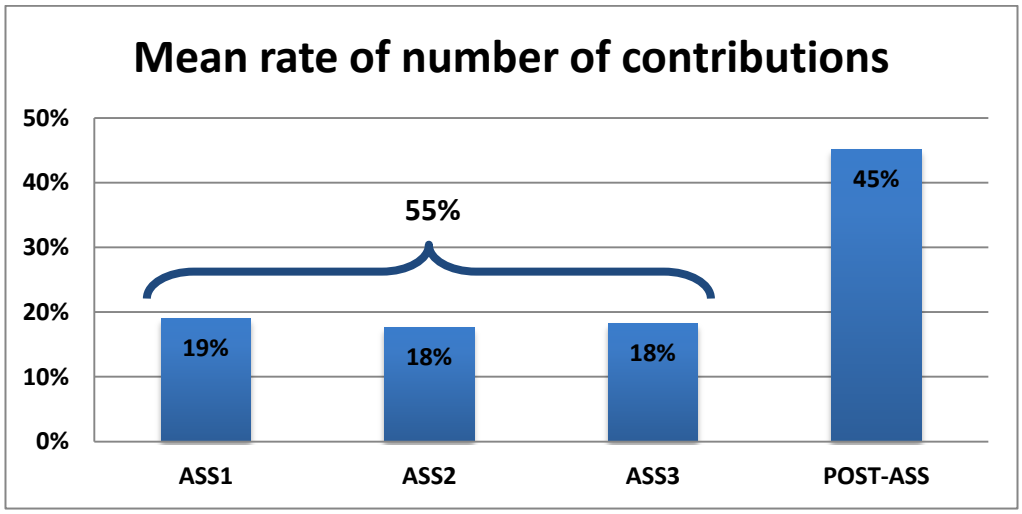


Table 2: Mean rate of number of contributions across the four phases of the project

When studying table 2, it becomes clear that the variable time spans across the three THA phases did not have any considerable impact on the contribution ratios of these phases. While ASS1 lasted for only 12 days and ASS3 took up 35, this did not influence the number of contributions per THA phase. As previously stated, this is probably due to the fact that the participants had to perform the same task over and over again across the three THA phases. Nevertheless, the fact that the POST-ASS contained almost half of the contributions made during the project (45%) in comparison to the three assignment phases (19%, 18% and 18%), indicates that an additional variable influenced the contribution ratio in the overall project. The fact that the POST-ASS phase lacked an educational incentive is the most viable explanation for this tendency and is not all that remarkable when considering the fact that without the educational incentive, a great deal of contribution anxiety (McBride 2009) is taken out of the project. An analysis of the content of these contributions, however, will have to indicate to what extent the contributions made during the POST-ASS phase are educationally led and so part of educationally relevant peer-to-peer communication. It is argued that without a task-based approach, students do not have a common communicative goal (Thompson & MacDonald 2005), which may cause communication breakdown (De Jong et al. 2005; Janssen et al. 2007; Slof et al. 2010; Zourou 2012). Consequently, this change in contribution ratio may indicate that a shift in educational and social incentives

[38] See Table 2.

influences the communicative strategy of the students[39]. The fact that the POST-ASS phase consists of considerably more contributions, further indicates that there is no communication breakdown when the task-based approach is eliminated from the project. A closer look into the content of these contributions will give stronger indications of their value considering the educational purpose of the forum[40].

In summary, when comparing the number of contributions across the three THA phases, no notable evolution could be observed. Nevertheless, when looking at the POST-ASS phase, it becomes clear that this phase – lacking an educational incentive – contains a considerably higher number of contributions. Student participation, as well as student engagement therefore appear to have changed during the last phase of the project as they adapted their communicative strategy along the way. The new social context in which the AW Facebook forum was used during the POST-ASS phase has also to be taken into account[41].

3.2 Contribution demographic

The variation in contribution ratio across the four phases of the project indicates that there has been a shift in student participation. However, it is necessary to look at the numbers on the overall contribution demographic, the statistics on how much participants contributed on a certain date, in order to support the argument that the social and educational incentives might be responsible for this evolution. Consequently, this contribution demographic might provide indications that the students' communicative strategy has changed over a certain period of time, due to the exclusion of the educational incentive during the POST-ASS phase. The following statistics were run on the mean contribution rate per phase per day. This provides an extensive overview of the daily contributions across the four phases of the project.

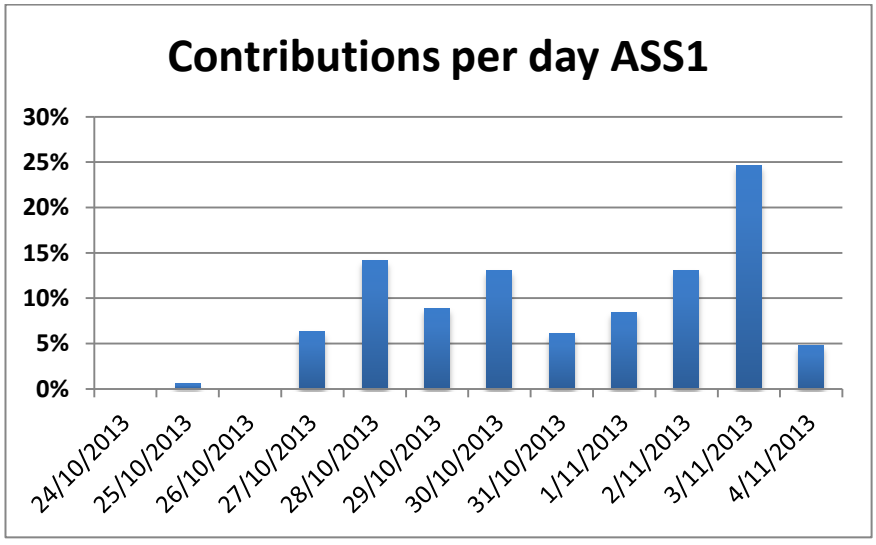


Table 3: Contributions per day for the period of ASS1

[39] In a metacognitive perspective this would entail a shift considering their knowledge of cognition on the one hand and their regulation of cognition on the other (Schraw 1998).
[40] See 3.4 L1 fallback.
[41] See discussion in 3.2 Contribution demographic.

During ASS1, it is noticeable that most contributions, about a quarter (24.7%), were made the day before the THA deadline[42]. There is no difference in contribution rate when considering posts, on the one hand, and comments, on the other (approximately 1/5 to 4/5, respectively). It also has to be noted that the contribution rate starts to increase around one week before the assignment deadline, with peaks eight days before the deadline and five days before the deadline (14.1% and 13.1% ,respectively). The fact that the contribution rate went up as soon as the deadline approached is a tendency which Alterman and Larusson (2013) have also observed during a case study on student blogging. Deadlines are considered as institutional interventions in the students' organisation of the format (Onrubia & Engel 2012), in this case part of the task-based approach introduced by the educational institution. The students therefore appear to work up to a common goal, a tendency which supports the importance of an educational incentive. It is interesting to compare the observed tendency in ASS1 with the demographic of the other two THA phases. These two phases lasted for a longer period of time; each about three times longer than ASS1. Although this factor did not have any considerable influence on the overall contribution ratio across the three THA phases, it might influence the students' communicative behaviour when considering the time frame in which they actually made their contributions. If there is any variation noticeable, this might indicate that there has already been a shift or evolution in their communicative strategies during the three THA phases of the project. Variation might also indicate that the time frame in which such assignments have to be completed may have considerable influence on student participation, as the description and requirements of the three THAs did not change across the three phases of the project.

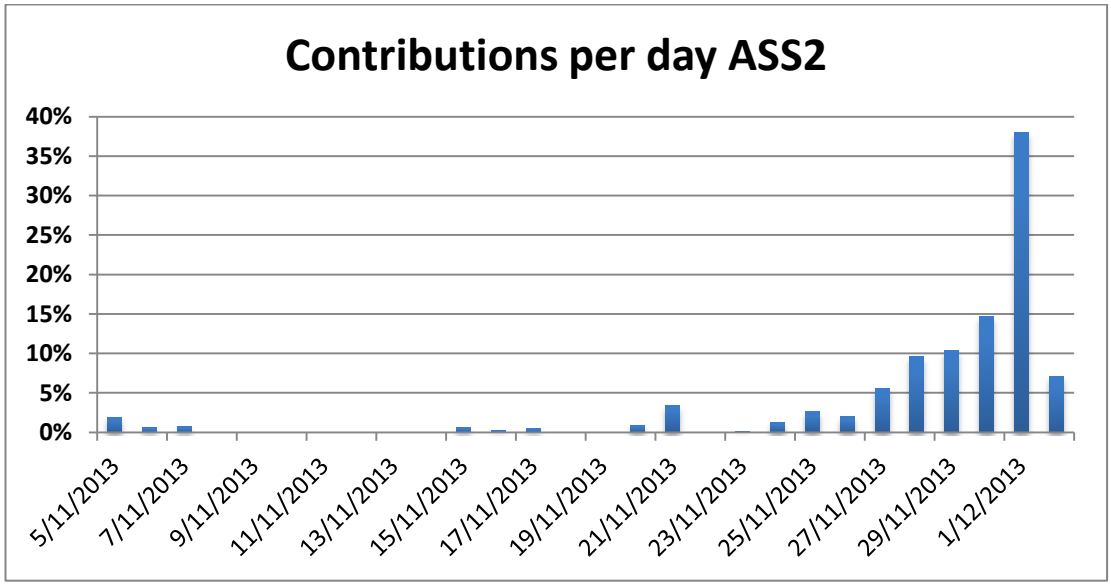


Table 4: Contributions per day for the period of ASS2

When looking at the demographics of ASS2 in the table above, it becomes clear that the same tendency can be observed as in ASS1. Only here, more than one-third (38.0%) of the contributions were made the day before the deadline for the second THA. This is more than half the number that has been observed during the first phase (24.7%). This indicates that students gradually postponed their contributions until the last day before the deadline,

[42] See Table 3.

probably because they were more acculturated to the forum after ASS1 and so felt more comfortable postponing their contributions instead of discussing them in advance. In addition, this provides an indication that more students are less engaged during the process of the second THA phase. The fact that during the week before the deadline, no additional peaks can be observed in the gradual increasing tendency towards the last day of the THA[43] supports this argument. The gradual incline towards the last day before the deadline nevertheless is quite similar to that of ASS1, which could indicate that the students keep on using the same communicative strategies in general across the two phases. Another observation is the fact that, when looking at the two days before the assignment deadline, the number of contributions in both phases doubled over night (from 13.1% to 24.7% in ASS1 and from 14.7% to 38.0% in ASS2). This also means that in ASS1 almost half, and in ASS2 more than half of the contributions were made two days before the assignment deadline. Alterman and Larusson (2013) argue that such a tendency is due to the loosely coordinated educational activity the students perform, meaning that there is no instance which actively monitors and guides the participants. In this enquiry, this could be due to the exclusion of a lecturer/tutor from the Facebook project. In addition, the percentages of daily contributions on the exact day of the deadline (at 12 noon) across the two phases were around a tenth of the overall contribution ratio (4.8% for ASS1 and 7.1% for ASS2). These numbers support the argument that students tend to work towards a deadline instead of discussing these assignments beforehand, a communicative strategy observed in both ASS1 and ASS2.

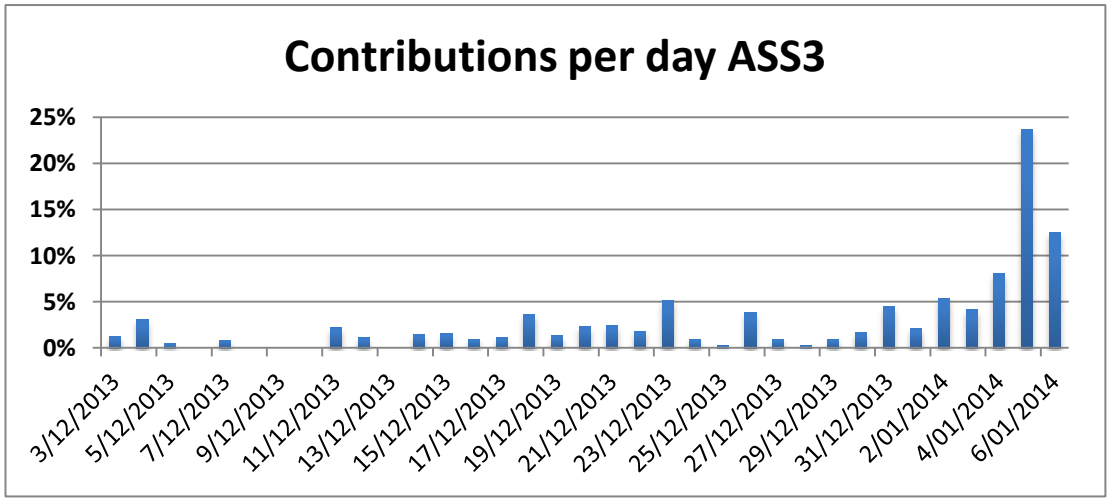


Table 5: Contributions per day for the period of ASS3

When looking at the demographic of ASS3, it becomes clear that the same tendency can be observed as during the previous THA phases. Again, it is noticeable that most of the contributions (approximately a quarter or 23.6%) were made during the day before the deadline of the third THA. This number is less high than during ASS2, and almost equal to that of ASS1. What is most striking when looking at table 5, is that there is a difference noticeable in the number of contributions made across the entire time span of ASS3 in comparison with the previous two phases. During these two phases of the project about four-fifth of the contributions were made during the seven days previous to the assignments' deadlines[44] (79.0% for ASS1 and 87.3% for ASS2), whereas during ASS3 only three-fifths

[43] In addition, the little tip 12 days before the deadline of ASS2 consists of a mere 3.4% of the contributions. Therefore, this number is not mentioned as a peak in the overall demographic of ASS2.
[44] The days of the deadlines themselves were also included into this calculation.

(60.3%) could be observed. This could indicate that participants' attitude towards the forum or the perception on their own individual role in the Facebook forum did change over time. This could mean that students became more aware of the educational value of the AW Facebook forum and that they slightly altered their communicative strategy by distributing their conversations across the entire time span of ASS3 more evenly than in the previous two THA phases. Students did interact more during the entire process of ASS3 than towards the end of the phase compared to ASS1 and ASS2. The fact that the incline towards the assignment deadline is much less steep than those in ASS1 and ASS2 supports this argument. Participants appear to be more frequently engaged on the AW Facebook forum and interact more on a daily basis with their peers. Another striking figure in ASS3 is the number of contributions made during the day of the deadline itself (12.5%): double the number of the same day during ASS1 (4.8%) and ASS2 (7.1%). This could indicate that during the time span of the three THA phases, an evolution in student participation has occurred, as a growing number of students appear to interact at the beginning of ASS3 and at the very end of that phase. Further research on the individual participation patters of the students could provide more definite argumentation for this hypothesis. However, it could already be argued that the AW Facebook forum itself, in particular its feature of community building, could be responsible for this division. Donath (1998), Preece (2000) and Zourou (2012) argue that a lack of direction provided by educational incentives or by the lecturer in the language learning classroom may lower student engagement, which could have resulted in a division of participatory and less participatory students in this project. The sense of community on such a Facebook forum might not be optimally functional; as such formats also entail weak social ties between individuals (Donath 2007), which may influence people who do not feel comfortable in this environment not to contribute because they do not feel fully part of the community of practice (Zourou 2012). Consequently, these numbers shed more light upon student engagement and provide a strong tendency towards a student division into participatory students and less participatory students. The communicative strategy of the community of practice accordingly might have changed across the three THA phases of the project. Further research into the social and educational character of these contributions has to support this argument[45].

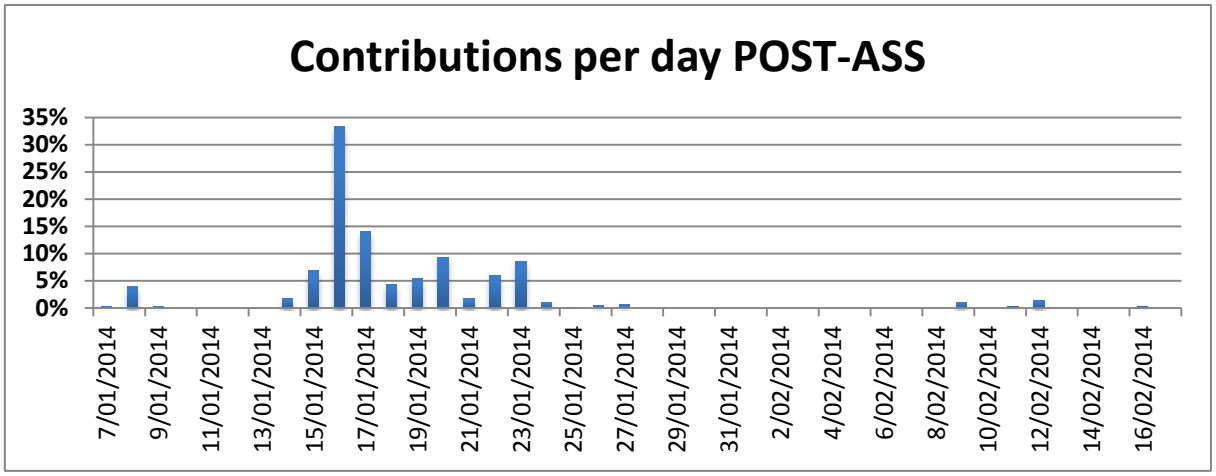


Table 6: contributions per day for the POST-ASS phase

[45] See 4.3.1.2 Personal engagement.

Finally, when looking at the demographic of the POST-ASS phase, it becomes clear that this tendency does not follow the previous findings from the three THA phases. When considering that the educational incentive, the variable integrated into the THAs, was taken out of the project at this point, it becomes clear what an impact that incentive has on the daily contribution ratio of the participants and, consequently, on their communicative strategies. The daily contribution demographic does not work up to a certain deadline anymore. In order to understand this demographic, it is important to note that during the majority of the POST-ASS phase (from 7 January 2014 to 27 January 2014) the Ba1 *Language & Literature - English* students underwent their first examination period at university. It was decided that the AW Facebook forum would be kept online during this period in order to observe how students would use this communication forum when the educational setting had changed. When considering that the POST-ASS phase consists of 1923 contributions, it is remarkable that almost half of them (47.4%) were made during two consecutive days (16 January 2014 and 17 January 2014). On the first day, 657 contributions were made and on the second 278. When looking at the content of these posts, it becomes clear that almost all contributions discuss the upcoming *English Grammar 1* examination, a compulsory course in the Ba1 *Language & Literature – English* at the University of Antwerp. Students mostly post questions and summaries of the course content and discuss certain aspects of the syllabus. These numbers support the argument that students rely on the AW Facebook forum as an educational environment, additional to a social environment. Even without the educational incentive of the THAs, educationally relevant communication is still present on the forum. It could be argued that the examinations formed a new educational incentive, an argument which certainly has to be taken into consideration. However, the fact that after the examination period, only 55 contributions (2.8%) were made, might indicate that students used the AW Facebook forum more for educational than for social purposes. This would mean that students know why they have to use the forum even without a task-based approach, but with the inclusion of an educational incentive of some sort[46]. In addition, almost half of the contributions were made during two consecutive days – which were two days before the exam of *English Grammar 1* examination. So it could be argued that they actually did work up to a deadline, namely, the deadline of the examination. This tendency could indicate that the communicative strategy of the students during the POST-ASS phase did not vary considerably from that of the THA phases. While this tendency supports the argument that students seem well aware of their communicative strategies on the AW Facebook forum[47], it also supports the argument that students need an educational incentive in order to perform educationally led communication. Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis has to determine to what extent the contributions made during the four phases are related to educationally led communication compared to more socially led communication[48].

[46] In this case, their exams.

[47] This provides strong indications that the students are well aware of their perceived self-efficacy. This tendency is discussed further in 4.3 Self-efficacy: students' attitude and perception.

[48] For a more elaborate discussion of these arguments, see 3.4 L1 fallback, 3.5 L2 Language complexity and readability and 4.1 Content analysis.

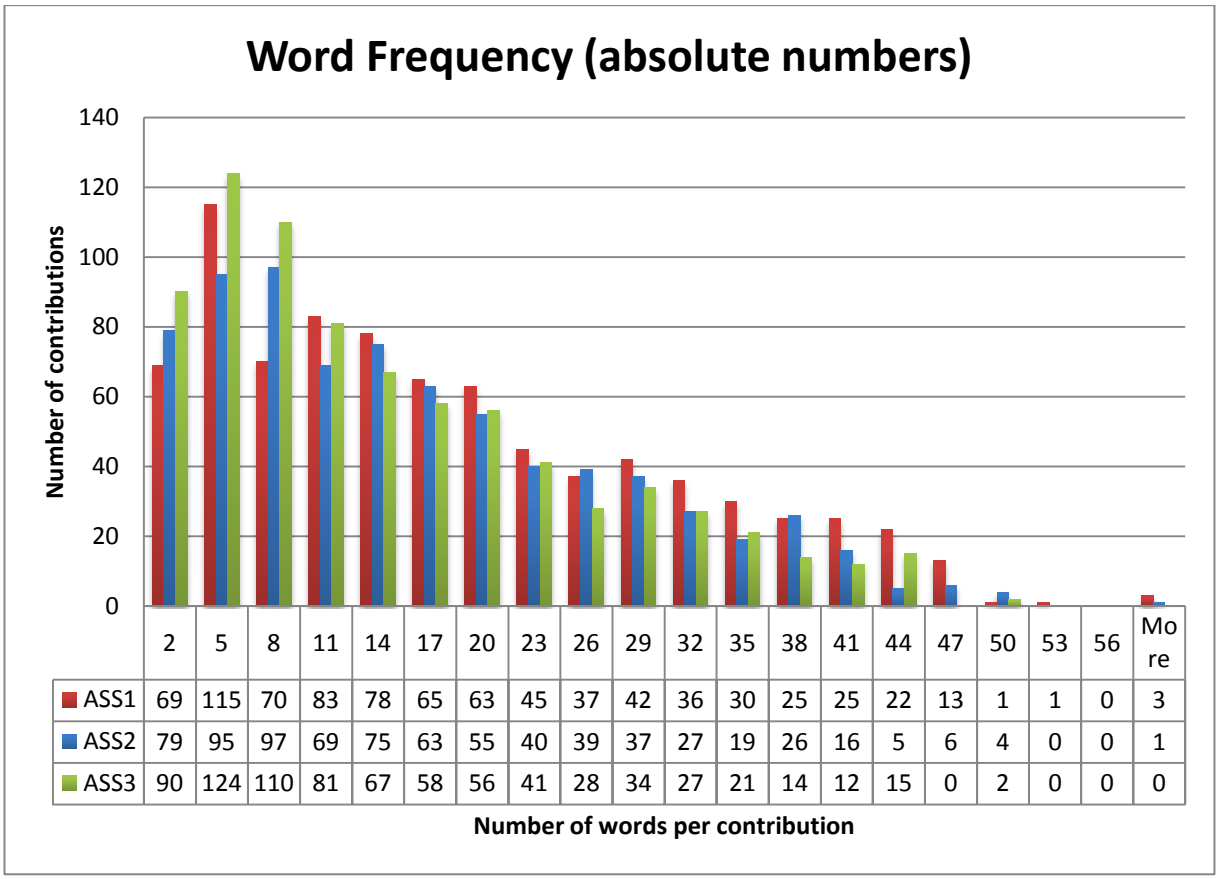
3.3 Contribution length

Performing an enquiry into the number of contributions provided an insight into students' participation patterns on the AW Facebook forum. However, it does not provide any insight into their language use. The language use is an indication on the students' self-efficacy, as it is a realisation of the communicative strategies they apply[49]. One factor which gives an extensive overview of a possible evolution of language use, is the length of the contributions performed on the AW Facebook forum[50]. This enquiry further indicates to what extent students are engaged on the platform and it provides hard numbers on their communicative strategies. Long contributions tend to contain more information than short ones (Afful & Mwinlaaru 2010)[51] and, additionally, imply more feedback from their peers. This tendency provides the individual contributions with a greater impact on the overall discussion forum (Alterman & Larusson 2013), and so with a greater network effect (Musser et al. 2007). Therefore the lengths of the individual contributions made on the AW Facebook forum were investigated. If consequently any significant changes occur across the four phases of the project concerning the contribution length, this can provide indications on how language use evolves in the online environment with and without an educational incentive. Therefore, the contribution length across the three THA phases was examined, first in order to look for any possible variation when an educational incentive is still present. In addition, comparing these figures to the contribution length of the POST-ASS phase sheds light on participants' language use without the educational stimulus and might support previously made assumptions on student engagement and the communicative strategies they apply. In order to compare the length of the contributions per phase, the number of words in every contribution has been counted. The three THA phases were then compared according to the ratio of words per contribution they entail. Henceforward, the insights of the three THA phases will be compared with the figures of the POST-ASS phase.

[49] As self-efficacy entails regulation of content as well as motivation (Zimmerman & Bandura 1994), which is closely linked to the sentence length of the contributions, as longer sentences yield more motivation and more content (Afful & Mwinlaaru 2010).

[50] It has to be noted that contribution length and language complexity do not have any correlation (Jensen & Potts 2004). For a further discussion on language complexity, see 3.5 L2 Language complexity and readability.

[51] As is fully described in 3.5 L2 Language complexity and readability.



	2	5	8	11	14	17	20	23	26	29	32	35	38	41	44	47	50	53	56	More
ASS1	69	115	70	83	78	65	63	45	37	42	36	30	25	25	22	13	1	1	0	3
ASS2	79	95	97	69	75	63	55	40	39	37	27	19	26	16	5	6	4	0	0	1
ASS3	90	124	110	81	67	58	56	41	28	34	27	21	14	12	15	0	2	0	0	0

Table 7: Word frequency across the three THA phases in absolute numbers

When comparing the three THA phases on word frequency, a significant change can be observed. When looking at the contribution length of ASS1, a ratio of 17.14 words/contribution is calculated. This number is the quotient of the total number of words in ASS1 and the number of contributions this phase consists of. ASS2 has a ratio of 15.42 words/contribution, according to the same calculation. When comparing ASS1 with ASS2 by using an unpaired t-test, there is a significant variation ($t = 2.7592$, $df = 1574$, $p = 0.006$)[52]. This entails that in ASS2 the contributions were significantly shorter than those in ASS1. Furthermore, ASS3 has a ratio of 13.97 words/contribution, according to the same calculation, as performed in ASS1 and ASS2. When comparing ASS2 with ASS3 by using an unpaired t-test, there is a significant variation on word frequency across these two THA phases ($t = 2.5089$, $df = 1531$, $p = 0.01$)[53]. This entails that contributions in ASS3 are significantly shorter than those in ASS2. The contribution length between ASS1 and ASS3 also shows significant variation ($t = 5.2580$, $df = 1601$, $p < 0.0001$)[54]. A variable which has to be kept in mind when looking at these variances is the variable of time between ASS1 and ASS3 which is much wider than between ASS1 and ASS2, and ASS2 and ASS3. Both phases mark the beginning and the end of the project in which the contributions still were influenced by the educational incentive of the THAs. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that the contributions in ASS3 were significantly shorter and therefore contained less information than those in ASS1. This difference in contribution length could be due to the fact that students were adapting to communicating on the format and felt more comfortable doing so

[52] See appendix 4: Table 1.
[53] See appendix 4: Table 2.
[54] See appendix 4: Table 3.

after a certain period of time[55]; since language socialisation and a sense of comfort enhance language output in such collaborative environments (Liaw 2007) and influence the interactivity and readability of the contributions (Liaw & English 2013). The authors further argue that this evolution resembles verbal interaction closer and closer when the participants become more comfortable with the community of practice in which they perform peer-to-peer communication. In addition, it could be inferred that students produce more readable and accessible contributions across the three THA phases of the project, which therefore contain less information. In other words, it could be inferred that students produce more socially led contributions when communicating with their peers after a certain period of time, as these contributions do not have to convey as much information as when communicating on a more educational level[56]. The possibility that students acculturated to the particular community of practice, namely, their fellow students, and, consequently, form a stronger mutual identity with them, could be a reason for this variation in their online language use. It is also possible that the social features of Facebook slowly became more and more integrated into the AW Facebook forum and influence the communicative strategies of the participants by making their contributions gradually shorter over time. It has to be noted that this tendency holds only if the contributions become less informative. If not, it could be the case that students convey more information using shorter contributions, which means they become able to write more concise sentences. An analysis of language complexity and readability will have to shed more light on this tendency. Finally, students' attitudes towards the use of the format, and the way they experienced the peer-to-peer communication on the AW Facebook forum, could provide more insight on student participation and the evolution of the participants' language use.

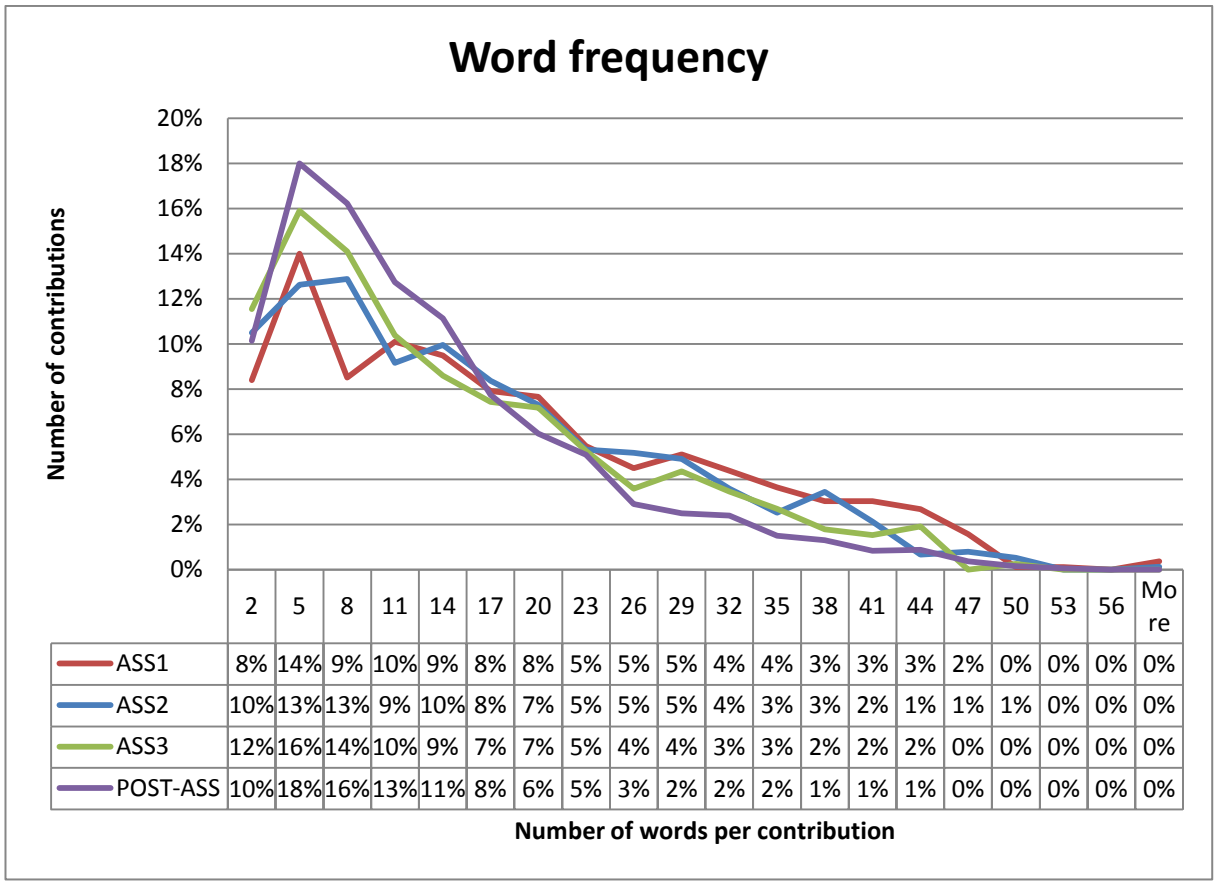
In order to attest the significance of the overall variation in word frequency across the three THA phases and to fight inflation of type I errors due to multiple t-tests, a three-way repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted. This ANOVA confirms the statistically significant decrease in students' contribution length across the three THA phases ($F(2, 2{,}353) = 13.91$, $p < 0.0001$). This means that the contributions performed in ASS1 were significantly longer than those in ASS2. That contributions in ASS2 were significantly longer than in ASS3 and that the overall decline in word frequency across the three THA phases is attested and found statistically significant. This tendency is visualised in table 7 where it becomes clear that ASS1 consists of less short contributions[57] than ASS3. In table 7 the absolute numbers were used. However, it has to be noted that these numbers, in order to be statistically significant, have to be matched by an unpaired t-test[58]. The variation in contribution length across the three THA phases is further represented in table 8, with addition of the variation in the POST-ASS phase.

[55] A phenomenon which is called 'academic acculturation' (Cheng & Fox 2008).

[56] For an extensive analysis of complexity and readability of the contributions, see. 3.5 L2 Language complexity and readability.

[57] As an indication of short contributions: compare the number of contributions which consist of one to eight words/contribution across the three THA phases of the project.

[58] By doing so, the numbers are calculated with regard to the number of contributions of each THA phase in which they occur. Table 7 therefore does not represent the variation in contribution length entirely correctly. The absolute numbers are still dependent on the actual number of contributions made in the three different THA phases, which is statistically represented in table 8. Table 7, nevertheless, was provided in order to give the reader an extensive overview which would make the study more transparent. The absolute numbers make things easier to grasp for the audience. The statistically correct numbers in table 8 were used to calculate the significant variation across the four phases of the project and to support the argumentation in this case study.



	2	5	8	11	14	17	20	23	26	29	32	35	38	41	44	47	50	53	56	More
ASS1	8%	14%	9%	10%	9%	8%	8%	5%	5%	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
ASS2	10%	13%	13%	9%	10%	8%	7%	5%	5%	5%	4%	3%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
ASS3	12%	16%	14%	10%	9%	7%	7%	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
POST-ASS	10%	18%	16%	13%	11%	8%	6%	5%	3%	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 8: Word frequency across the four phases of the project in percentages

When adding the fourth phase (POST-ASS) into the equation, it becomes clear that this phase follows the previous findings along the same lines. The contribution length across the POST-ASS phase has a ratio of 12.35 words/contribution. This number is the quotient of the total number of words in the POST-ASS phase and the number of contributions this phase consists of. Consequently, ASS3 and the POST-ASS phase were compared on contribution length variation because these two phases of the study have the lowest ratio in words/contribution, and show the least wide range in time span (35 and 42 days, respectively). Furthermore, both phases were closest to each other in the project's overall time span. If the variation in contribution length across these two phases is significant, a four-way repeated-measures ANOVA will calculate the significance of the overall variation across the four phases of the project. When comparing ASS3 and the POST-ASS phase by means of an unpaired t-test, the contribution length between the two shows significant variation ($t = 3.7793$, $df = 2701$, $p = 0.0002$)[59]. This entails that contributions made in the POST-ASS phase are significantly shorter than those made in ASS3. To fight inflation of type I errors due to multiple t-tests, a four-way repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted in order to attest the significance of the variation in word frequency across the four phases of the case study. This ANOVA confirms the statistically significant decrease in students' contribution length across the four phases ($F(3, 4{,}275) = 40.41$, $p < 0.0001$). These findings confirm the tendency which was already attested in the three THA phases, namely, that contributions across the four phases of the project become shorter and shorter and thus might yield less information. The exclusion of the educational incentive appears not to have caused

[59] See appendix 4: Table 4.

a major shift in this decline, as the gradual decrease does not show any breaches when comparing the four phases of the project. It therefore is safe to infer that the conversations in the POST-ASS phase contained less information than those in the three THA phases, however, no significant breach in the communicative strategies of the students was observed when comparing these two phases alone. In other words, the decrease in contribution length entails a significant gradual change in the communicative strategies of the participants. The fact that 'from a social semiotic perspective, language is not merely a carrier of meaning but a system of meaning involving multiple semantic choices embedded in the social contexts when language is deployed' (Halliday 1987: 170 qtd. in Liu & English 2013: 161), supports the argument that students might tend to simplify their language in order to generate more socially adequate contributions, opposed to the more formal and educationally led contributions they have to perform. In other words, students might want to form a contrast with the educationally led communication when talking to their peers on the AW Facebook forum about social matters[60]. This tendency supports previous findings on the online language used educationally in SNSs, where language socialisation resulted in an enhancement of language use (Liaw 2007) and in short, more accessible contributions (Liaw & English 2013). This argumentation is supported by the theory that language entails more than solely providing information and also conveys emotion and cultural attitude, which contribute to more efficient language socialisation (Byram & Morgan 1994; Halliday 1987).

In summary, the analysis of the contribution length across the four phases of the project appears to reveal a gradual change in the communicative strategies of the students from more educational towards more social peer-to-peer communication. The qualitative analysis has to shed more light on these findings and support the argumentation. In addition, two more aspects of language use will be considered in order to clarify these tendencies, and to support previous argumentation. These additional features are the L1 fallback of the students and the language complexity of their contributions on the AW Facebook forum.

3.4 L1 fallback

The potential evolution in students' communicative strategies – concerning educationally led and socially led communication – might also yield a change in the use of students' L1 and L2. The enquiry into participants' L1 fallback therefore has the purpose of gauging to what extent the decrease in contribution length is linked to students' use of both languages.

The use of students' L1 in the FLL classroom has long been considered an ineffective language learning approach (Atkinson 1993; Swan 1985). However, researchers do agree that the use of the L1 by a lecturer or tutor can be a constructive strategy when collective communicative problems arise in the language learning classroom (Macaro 2001; Nzwanga 2000; Polio & Duff 1994). Introducing and explaining subjects on various topics in the curriculum and giving instructions, which are not fully understood by students, may cause irritation or communication breakdown. When this happens, it is more productive to explain or 'directly translate' the content of the issue in the L1 of the language learning classroom (Cole 1998).

[60] This argument is further analysed in 3.5 L2 Language complexity and readability as this section sheds more light on the amount of information conversations consist of across the four phases of the project.

In order to examine if students apply the same communicative strategies in an unrestricted online environment, the focus of this part of the study lies on the number of fallbacks into the participants' L1 during discussions on the AW Facebook forum and the communicative purpose the fallbacks entail. First of all, it has to be noted that the AW Facebook forum is a communicative environment outside of the actual classroom. Nevertheless, the platform is part of the participants' educational setting, as they contribute educationally led information, generate new content and organise group discussions. Group discussions mainly characterise the AW Facebook forum as an online collaborative and communicative space for students to discuss and participate in educationally relevant interaction (Lampe et al. 2011).

Research (Ur 1996; Cook 2001) has shown that it can be difficult to keep students interacting in the L2 while they are engaged in group discussions. When students participate in discussions, they often tend to code-switch between their L1 and the L2 (Nzwanga 2000). Cook (2001) argues that this occurs mainly when students try to explain the objective of a task to their peers, negotiate roles in group discussions or check their own understanding of the L2 against their peers. Brooks and Donato (1994) further point out that the fallback into the L1 is performed mainly by students to initiate and sustain interaction with each other in order to prevent a breakdown of communication. It therefore seems that the main feature of code-switching to the L1 in the FLL classroom is the fact that interaction in the L1 is characterised mainly by social behaviour, as students tend to use it to establish social roles, provide additional information to their peers and ensure that communication will not collapse (Anton & Dicamilla 1999)[61]. Community building also encourages code-switching as it would not be beneficent for anyone in the community of practice if communication were to break down (Anton & Dicamilla 1999). Students tend to produce educationally led content in the L2 (Cook 2001). This is due mainly to the fact that they feel monitored by their tutors and have to perform well in order to be perceived as adequately proficient. In addition, students have mostly been introduced to the subject or discussion topic in the L2 before the actual discussions take place. This makes it easier for them to use the L2 with correct terminology and to follow the threads that already have been explained by the tutor. The use of students' L2 in the FLL classroom, however, may be hampered by stress and anxiety. Lightbown and Spanda (2013) argue that people tend to fall back on old patterns when confronted with a stressful situation, a tendency which – according to the authors – is perfectly applicable to code-switching during discussions in the language learning classroom.

The analysis of the participants' L1 fallback makes use of the same four-phase division applied earlier on in the research. The division makes it possible to investigate the number of L1 and L2 contributions in each phase. As research has shown, L1 contributions tend to be more socially relevant and L2 contributions tend to be more educationally relevant. The number of contributions made in Dutch (L1 of the participants) were counted and divided by the number of contributions made in English (L2). When considering the number of contributions made in Dutch, a division has been made between contributions which are exclusively Dutch and contributions containing Dutch, as well as English words or phrases. This distinction enables me to study to what extent educational jargon has been used in Dutch contributions. It also enables me to investigate how the L1 influences the L2 and

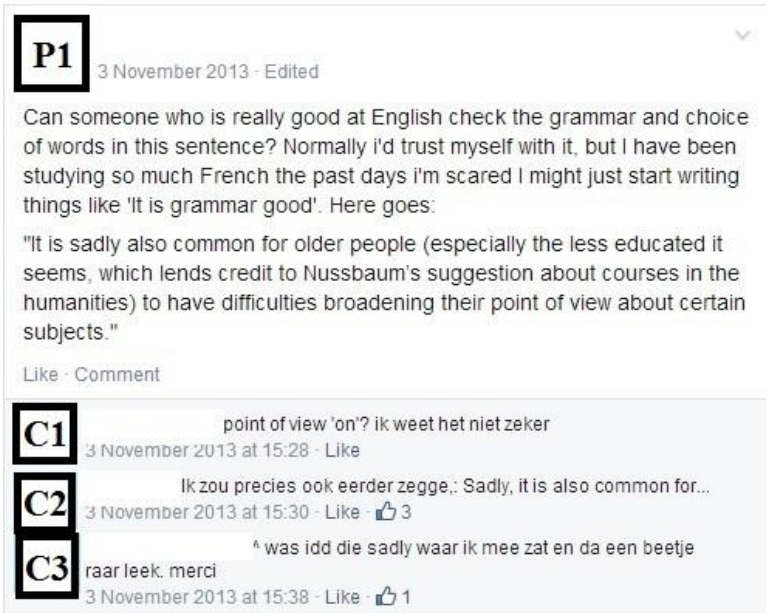
[61] Anton and Dicamilla (1999) regard this tendency as 'construction of scaffolded help, establishment of intersubjectivity, and use of private speech' (245).

whether Dutch vocabulary creeps into conversations in English. This might indicate a shift between the educational and social character of the AW Facebook forum as the communicative strategy of the students would have changed.

The language use during the three THA phases is investigated against the backdrop of the previous argumentation on student engagement, identity building and the social and educational features of the AW Facebook forum. These findings will then be compared to the POST-ASS phase in order to examine whether the absence on an educational incentive will influence the students' L1 fallback even further.

3.4.1 Educational vs. social interactional features

In ASS1, no contributions were found which consisted of exclusively Dutch words or phrases. However, four out of the 822 contributions did contain Dutch vocabulary, which equals 0.5% of the overall contributions. Three of the four contributions containing Dutch were comments on one post, as can be seen in conversation 1[62] below:



Conversation 1: ASS1, conversation containing L1

The most striking feature of these comments is that the original post did not contain any Dutch words or phrases. Which means that the first commentator (C1) was the first one to use Dutch on the AW Facebook forum. She did so to express her uncertainty about her answer to the initial question. The factor of stress (Lightbown & Spanda 2013) is the most fitting explanation for this action. The commentator is not sure about her answer[63] and therefore tries to protect herself from any criticism. This part of the comment can be regarded as a Dutch contribution which is influenced by *target language anxiety* (Levine

[62] All Facebook conversations in the present study were made unrecognisable for privacy purposes. Furthermore, all relevant contributions in the L1 (Dutch) were translated in English.
[63] As her comments can be translated as: C1: 'point of view "on"? I don't know for sure', C2: 'I would also prefer,: Sadly, it is also common for... ', C3: '^ it was indeed that sadly that bothered me and seemed strange to me. thanks'.

2003), the anxiety to use an L2 when conveying debatable information[64]. The fact that the second (C2) and third (C3) commentators also use Dutch, can be ascribed to the language use of the first commentator. They continue on the same practice as their predecessor by joining in the dialogue using their L1 (Swain & Lapkin 1998). The authors further argue that dialogue and discussion in the FLL classroom could serve both the purpose of communication, which has a more social character, and the purpose of a cognitive tool, which has a more educational character and is used to 'jointly construct knowledge' (333). These two purposes could be switched very quickly in discussions and conversations, which could further entail a code-switch between the L1 and the L2. This distinction could be regarded as a distinction between socially led and educationally led communication on the AW Facebook forum; as socially led communication could be regarded as having mainly a social purpose, and educationally led communication as having mainly an informative purpose. Both uses entail a different kind of communicative strategy, sparked by a different kind of incentive: the social features of Facebook and the task-based approach, respectively. It appears that in the AW Facebook forum both purposes could be switched. Because, although the first commentator knows that she is supposed to reply in the L2, she code-switches to perform a socially led contribution due to target language anxiety. The social and educational communicative purpose of the peer-to-peer communication in this example therefore seem to coincide, and could possibly even enhance each other.

In order to support this argument, contributions in the other phases of the project have to be compared with the findings of ASS1. During ASS2, six out of the 753 contributions were made in Dutch and three others, additionally, contained Dutch words or phrases. These two categories equal 1.2% of the overall contributions. One of the contributions which was written wholly in Dutch was a comment on an all-English post:

Conversation 2: ASS2, conversation containing L1

The first commentator (C1) who replies, does so in Dutch. The comment entails a high emotional value as the participant feels dejected[65]. The emotional power contributes to the fact that the comment is completely written in the student's L1 (Dewaele 2004), even though the initial post did not entail any incentives for that, nor did it contain any Dutch vocabulary.

[64] In this case, information of which the first commentator is not sure of herself.
[65] The comment can be translated as: 'It's always me pff'.

This example supports the argument that socially led contributions yield the use of the L1, whereas more educationally led contributions yield the use of the L2. This tendency reveals a change in students' communicative strategy when confronted with another communicative purpose in one and the same online environment. Another example of L1 contributions in ASS2 is conversation 3. In comparison with conversation 2, this example entails certain incentives which spark the commentators to use their L1 instead of their L2.

Conversation 3: ASS2, conversation containing L1

Because of the fact that, in the third comment, the participant (P1) remarks that his text editing software has a Dutch language setting, the other participants assist him by providing the appropriate Dutch terminology. This problem-solving strategy employs Dutch in order to avoid ambiguity and to provide an efficient solution (Cole 1998; Cook 2001). The translated terminology then again sparks the use of Dutch throughout the comment section of this post. When the problem is solved, though, the commentator who started to use Dutch in the first place, switches back to English again. The initial code-switching is due to the fact that the problem solving itself required Dutch, and it was the most socially acceptable thing to do for the other participants to use their L1. If they had commented in English, the problem might not have been solved as fast as it was now. The aspect of solving those problems not related to courses[66] using the L1 adds to the argument that the educationally led interactions

[66] As this problem mostly entails a practical problem instead of a remark or question about the course content or material of the *All Write* course.

primarily entail the use of English and the more socially related interactions primarily entail the use of Dutch[67].

During ASS3, a whole new tendency can be observed in comparison to ASS1 and ASS2. Fifty-nine of the 780 contributions namely were performed in Dutch, whereas 14 contained Dutch words or phrases, which equals 9.4% of the total number of contributions. The first example is an English post of someone who was ill during the last class and so could not attend. She asks for more information about a given assignment.

Conversation 4: ASS3, conversation containing L1

The conversation contains a high degree of code-switching. The initial post (P1) is in English and is a question whether someone could give her the necessary information on a new in-

[67] A tendency which has already been attested to by Swain and Lapkin (1998), concerning face-to-face discussions in the FLL classroom.

class assignment[68]. The first commentator (C1) replies to the question using Dutch, apart from some English terminology and the topic of the writing assignment. The commentator (C1) probably interpreted the initial post as a socially-related problem instead of an educational one. She therefore replied to her peer by providing accurate and accessible information in the L1 (Cole 1998; Cook 2001). Other participants also added comments in Dutch, and discussed the set-up of the assignment. However, one participant (C6) comments in English and so influences the rest of the discussion. The next comment (C7) is also in English. Both contributions talk exclusively about the content and structure of the assignment, which could be regarded as a specific educationally led posting in comparison to the other contributions in this particular discussion. In the next comment (C8), the code switches back to Dutch as the participant is still confused about certain terminology, which yields the use of the L1 by the other participants in order to reduce complexity and ambiguity (C9). So as to not cause any additional confusion, the terminology appears to be consistently referred to in English. The fact that various code-switching occurs in this discussion is due to the fact that educational and social purposes are intertwined. The educational incentive in this conversation is the set-up of the new assignment and the explanation of the terminology, while the social feature is helping a fellow student with a problem not particularly related to the course content: the fact that she could not make it to class that day. Conversation 4 supports the argument that the use of the L1 on the AW Facebook forum chiefly entails socially led contributions in comparison to the educationally led contributions in the L2.

In the course of ASS3, a new phenomenon occurred which has not been observed in ASS1 and ASS2. Participants posted contributions in Dutch from the first post onwards. These posts received Dutch comments exclusively and talked almost exclusively about problems and questions which were not course related[69]. Conversation 5 exemplifies this as participants discuss an administrative problem concerning the enrollment numbers for the upcoming examination period. The initial post (P1) is performed in Dutch and the three following comments are also in Dutch.

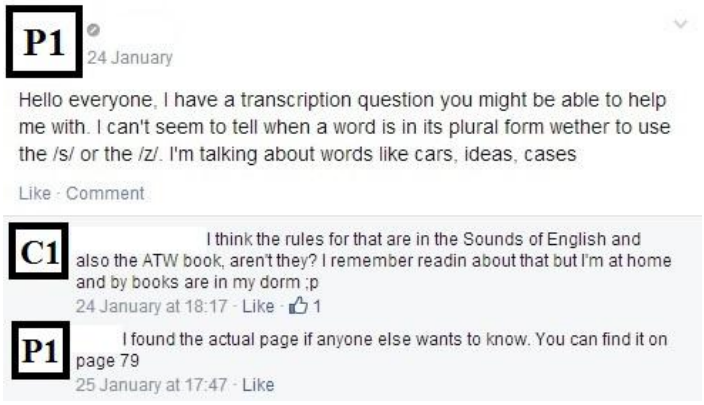
Conversation 5: ASS3, conversation exclusively containing L1

In ASS3, various contributions are made which employ the L1 in non-course-related conversation from the initial post onwards. The L1 contributions are mainly socially led and

[68] Not to be confused with the three THAs.
[69] The content of these contributions is discussed further in the qualitative analysis of this research.

discuss administrative problems the students encounter. Additionally, the discussions seem functional in the perspective of the forum's purpose of fostering peer-to-peer communication in order to solve problems. It could be argued that students became more and more acculturated to use of the AW Facebook forum, as they produce L1 contributions from the initial post onwards; a tendency not observed in ASS1 and ASS2. It appears that the students' communicative strategy is changing slightly across the three THA phases of the project. ASS3 contains considerably more L1 contributions, which also contain more socially relevant information. In order to further explore these findings, the POST-ASS phase was analysed. In this phase, a distinctive evolution in the use of the L1 in the students' conversations could be observed. During this phase, 325 contributions of the 1923 were made in the L2 (16.9%), 1153 were made in Dutch (60.0%) and 445 contained Dutch words or phrases (23.1%). In comparison to the three THA phases, this tendency is quite remarkable. It shows that there has been a shift in the language use and, consequently, a shift in participants' communicative strategies concerning their peer-to-peer communication. It is safe to infer that participants' language use evolved through a shift in the social and educational character of the forum.

In order to support this argument and examine to what extent this tendency is realised in the POST-ASS phase, the content of the contributions containing different kinds of language use were analysed. An example of a prototypical L2 contribution in the POST-ASS phase is conversation 6.



Conversation 6: POST-ASS phase, conversation in L2

This conversation discusses a course-related question (P1) about *Articulatory Phonetics*, a section of the *English Proficiency 1* course. The two following comments are also in English and discuss the pages of the course book and where to find the correct information. The conversation could be considered educationally relevant because it focuses on the course content of the university's curriculum. The conversation appears therefore to be performed in the L1. The next conversation is a prototypical example of a conversation which entails code-switching in the POST-ASS phase.

Conversation 7: POST-ASS phase, conversation containing L1 and L2

Code-switching happens when the initial course-related question (P1) has been answered. From the fourth comment onwards (second C1), participants add further course-related remarks to the discussion that simultaneously contains the L1 and the L2. The use of the L1 is initiated in the fourth comment to express uncertainty about the reply and entails target language anxiety (Levine 2003). As the conversation continues, the participants keep switching between the two languages until the last comment. This comment (last C2) is socially relevant and does not build on to the previous educational discussion. It therefore is produced in the participants' L1. The examples support the previously made argument about the difference in language use when considering the purpose of the conversation. In order to further support the argument, a last example is provided. This is a prototypical L1 conversation in the POST-ASS phase.

Conversation 8: POST-ASS, conversation in L1

The conversation is socially relevant[70] and does not relate to any course content. The fact that it does not serve any educational purpose is the main reason why it is written down entirely in the L1 of the participants. These examples support the argument that socially led conversations, particularly, contain L1 contributions and that educationally led conversations, particularly, contain contributions in the L2. In order to attest the variation in the use of L1 and L2 across the four phases of the project, a comparative analysis of the number of contributions was performed.

3.4.2 Comparative analysis

When comparing the three phases according to L1 fallback, it becomes clear that ASS3[71] contains considerably more Dutch contributions than ASS1[72] and ASS2[73]. When the three phases are compared by using an unpaired t-test, the variation between ASS1 and ASS2 is not significant ($t = 1.8918$, $df = 1570$, $p = 0.0587$). This means that there were not significantly more contributions containing Dutch in ASS2 then there were in ASS1. However, when comparing ASS2 with ASS3 using an unpaired t-test, the variation between the two phases is significant ($t = 7.2846$, $df = 1530$, $p < 0.0001$). This means that there are significantly more contributions made containing Dutch in ASS3 than in ASS2. The same applies to the calculation of the variation between ASS1 and ASS3 using an unpaired t-test ($t = 8.7154$, $df = 1598$, $p < 0.0001$). To fight inflation of type I errors due to multiple t-tests, a three-way repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted in order to attest the significance of the variation in the use of the L1 in the three THA phases of the case study. The ANOVA confirms the statistically significant increase in students' use of Dutch in their contributions during these phases ($F (2, 2{,}349) = 57.93$, $p < 0.0001$).

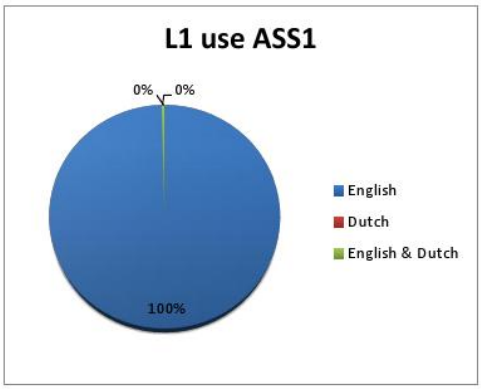


Table 9: L1 use during ASS1

Table 10: L1 use during ASS2

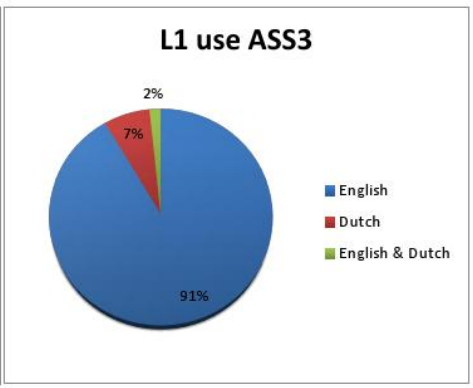


Table 11: L1 use during ASS3

A shift in the use of students' L1 could be observed when looking at the numbers of the three THA phases. ASS3 comprises significantly more contributions containing Dutch than ASS1 and ASS2. A possible explanation for this tendency is the fact that, after a certain period of time, students acculturated to the AW Facebook forum as a communicative environment and started to produce more socially relevant contributions despite the educational incentive.

[70] As the post can be translated as: 'If you are ill, and you cannot go to the exam, what do you have to do?'
[71] See Table 11.
[72] See Table 9.
[73] See Table 10.

This tendency is referred to as 'socialisation' and prototypically entails a shift in language use (Halliday 1987). As observed in Liaw and English's study (2013), the shift is regarded mainly as a simplification of the language use of the participants which makes their contributions more accessible to their peers[74]. The authors further argue that this tendency fosters a more effective language socialisation and community building among the participants. In this particular case study, however, it is safe to infer that the change in communicative purpose had an influence on the participants' use of the L1 and the L2. It could be observed that the L1 contributions were more socially- than educationally led and that the L2 contributions contained considerably more educationally than socially relevant information. These observations further support the argument that a shift in communicative purpose entails a shift in the language use on the AW Facebook forum[75]. It could therefore be argued that – after a certain period of time – participants considered the AW Facebook forum as a social collaborative space as well as an educational environment[76]. The reason being that the social features made the contributions more accessible[77].

In order to support this argument, the numbers of the POST-ASS phase were compared with those of ASS3 using an unpaired t-test. These two phases were used in this calculation because they show the least extensive variation in L1 contributions. This analysis sheds more light on the previous argumentation, as the POST-ASS phase no longer contains any educational incentive, which would entail that more socially-relevant, and, therefore, more Dutch, contributions could be observed in the POST-ASS phase. When comparing ASS3 with the POST-ASS phase, the increase of L1 use is significant across these two phases ($t = 49.0882$, $df = 2701$; $p < 0.0001$). This means that significantly more contributions were made in the L1 during the POST-ASS phase than in ASS3. To attest the significance of the variation in the use of the L1 across the four phases of the case study and to fight inflation of type I errors due to multiple t-tests, a four-way repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted. This ANOVA confirms the statistically significant increase in students' use of Dutch in their contributions across the four phases of the project ($F(3, 4{,}271) = 2{,}824.15$, $p < 0.0001$).

[74] For a more elaborate analysis of this study and the evolution of language complexity in the project, see 3.5 L2 Language complexity and readability.

[75] Liaw and English (2013) also made this conclusion, considering that the simplification of the language use is due to a more social nature of the contributions over time. However, in their research there was no language shift from the L2 to the L1 noticeable due to the fact that their participants were monolingual French and monolingual Taiwanese and had to use English as a lingua franca in order to be understood.

[76] An additional argument supporting this theory comes from Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000), who state that the process of foreign language acquisition 'often involves a stage where the learner experiences a loss, leaving behind one (L1) context and feeling forced to leave behind the sense of self that corresponds with that context' (qtd. in McBride 2009: 39). This loss of identity therefore may influence the language use of the participants as the format of Facebook both relies on and fosters this identity building. When confronted with an environment that requires the use of an L2, participants might therefore revert to a more familiar L1 when experiencing tension or target language anxiety.

[77] A tendency attested to by Brooks and Donato (1994), Cook (2001) and Liaw and English (2013).

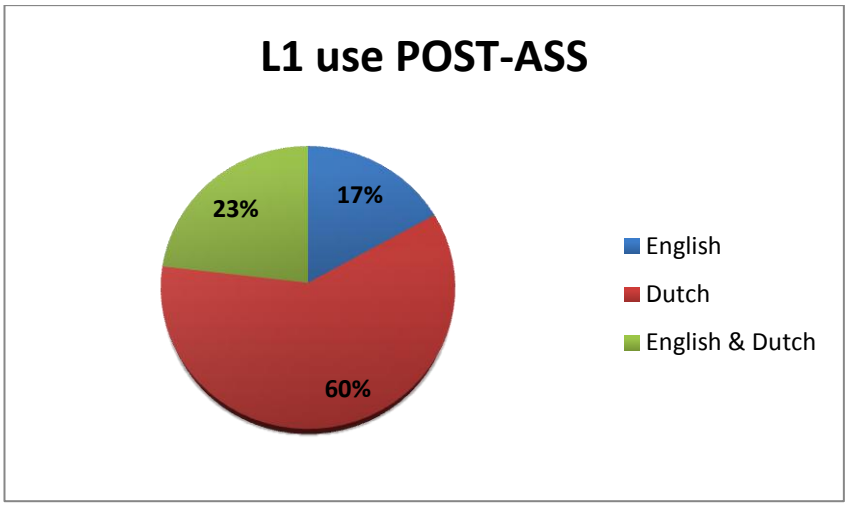


Table 13: L1 use during POST-ASS phase

These findings make it safe to conclude that a significant shift in the use of the L1 in contributions on the AW Facebook forum occurred after ASS3, when the educational incentive of the THAs was excluded from the project. It already has been observed that considerably more socially led contributions than educationally led contributions were made in the POST-ASS phase. Furthermore, it is to be noted that the vast majority of the course-related contributions during the POST-ASS phase were produced in the L2, or contained L2 vocabulary or phrases. It is therefore safe to infer that the communicative purpose of the contributions on the AW Facebook forum evolved over time as well as the students' language use. This tendency was already observable in the three THA phases and is supported by the findings of the POST-ASS phase. These last findings indicate that as soon as the educational purpose of the forum switches to a more social one, the language use gets adjusted accordingly[78]. These findings support the arguments made earlier in this research that educationally led communication mainly entails the use of the L2 whereas socially led communication mainly entails the use of the L1. This tendency is fostered by the social and educational incentives the community of practice received during the project. The task-based approach supports the use of educationally led communication, while the social features of Facebook stimulate the use of the L1 in order for conversations to be more accessible. Because of this shift in communicative strategy concerning the L1 and the L2, it is necessary to gauge to what extent the distinction influences the language and, in particular, the complexity of the contributions. Therefore, an analysis of language complexity and readability was conducted on the L2 contributions of the four phases of the project. These contributions were mainly educationally relevant and particularly provide more insight into the evolution of participants' L2 language use in this perspective.

[78] It has to be noted that this entails foremost the code-switching between the L1 and the L2 of the participants.

3.5 L2 language complexity and readability

In order to obtain more insight into the language use and the consequent language evolution of the participants on the AW Facebook forum, language complexity[79] and readability[80] of the English contributions were assessed. Language complexity gauges the lexical density of the contributions by calculating 'the proportion of lexical words to the total number of words in a text stated as a percentage' (Afful & Mwinlaaru 2010: 13). In other words, this formula[81] calculates the percentage of lexical words in comparison to the total number of words in each contribution. In this way it becomes clear how much information the contributions in a certain phase of the project contains, as lexical words are more informative than non-lexical words (Afful & Mwinlaaru 2010). The language complexity – or lexical density – of the contributions in the four phases of the project was calculated using open-source text-analysis software (*textalyser.net* 2004). This software program has also been used by Liaw and English (2013) for the same purpose. The language complexities of the three THA phases are compared to each other and to the POST-ASS phase. It is to be noted that contributions containing Dutch were excluded from the calculation of language complexity and readability. As the L2 contributions entail more educationally relevant communication, it is necessary to assess them separately in order to gauge the particular language complexity of these specific contributions, which were influenced by the educational incentive present in the AW Facebook forum.

	ASS1 (n = 817)	**ASS2 (n = 744)**	**ASS3 (n = 707)**	**POST-ASS (n = 325)**
Complexity factor (Lexical density)	26.4%	27.9%	32.9%	51.8%
Readability (Gunning-Fog Index[82])	6.4	5.8	5.9	7.3

Table 12: Complexity factor and readability of the English contributions across the four phases of the project

When looking at the percentages in table 12, it becomes clear that the complexity factor of the L2 contributions increased across the three THA phases of the project. This tendency is a new way of looking at findings of Liaw and English (2013), who conducted a study on the online communication patterns of students on an official project website and on a peer-to-peer communication forum on Facebook. On both websites, students had to contribute educationally led information by using a task-based approach (162-163). The authors found a significant difference between two types of contributions when considering language complexity and readability. The contributions on the Facebook forum were less complex and more readable than on the official project website, despite the fact that students had to post

[79] Language complexity is regarded as the lexical density of the contributions and compares the percentage of lexical and functional words in one's writing in order to determine the informative level of each contribution (Liaw & English 2013).

[80] Language readability is determined by the use of an algorithm that takes the total number of words, the total number of sentences and the total number of complex words into account. It determines how accessible a text is to an audience by means of a 20-point scale (Gunning 1968).

[81] 'Lexical density = (number of lexical words/total number of words)*100' (Afful & Mwinlaaru 2010: 13).

[82] 6 = easy, 20 = hard.

the same information. The postings on the forum were more diverse and included 'expressive, directive, phatic and heuristic features' (173) – in addition to conveying information. These features made the contributions on the Facebook forum more informal, but also more interactional, which intensified language socialisation. The present study expands on these findings and gauges the longitudinal evolution of the language complexity and readability of participants' contributions on a Facebook forum. When looking at the numbers of the three THA phases, it becomes clear that L2 complexity increased as the readability of the contributions remained relatively stable. This could entail that participants' contributions became more and more complex as the project progressed. Liaw and English (2013) argue that a lower complexity factor and the use of shorter sentences are not only features of spoken interaction, but also of online contributions which are more socially than educationally relevant[83]. The authors argue that most of the contributions which did not address the task-based approach in the project contained less complex language use. It could therefore be argued that more personal, socially led interactions on a Facebook forum similar to that in this project, have a smaller lexical density and are less complex than more educationally induced contributions. The fact that in this case study the language use of the L2 contributions became more complex could indicate that they became more educational. The main factor which influenced this is the fact that socially led contributions, which, in the research of Liaw and English (2013) were also performed in English, were performed in the participants' L1[84]. In their research the language use simplified and became more accessible over time, while in this case study the same could be observed as the use of the L1 entails an easier and more accessible way of communication than the L2 (Anton & Dicamilla 1999; Brooks & Donato 1994; Cole 1998; Cook 2001). The fact that the POST-ASS phase has a considerably higher L2 complexity factor supports the argument that the students made a distinction between social and educational communication on the AW Facebook forum by adapting the communicative strategy of their contributions.

Finally, an additional factor which supports this argumentation is the level of readability of the contributions across the four phases of the project. These percentages, represented by a Gunning-Fog Index[85], were calculated by the same text-analysis software program as the lexical density. It is noticeable that, despite the minor change in the first phase of the project, the readability index did not evolve considerably during the three THA phases. This is possibly due to the fact that students employed the same educational terminology across the three THA phases. However, it is noticeable that the readability of the contributions in the POST-ASS phase did change notably compared to the other three phases. This tendency supports the previously made argument that the L2 contributions in the POST-ASS phase were particularly educationally led as the contributions were more complex and less accessible than the same contributions in the previous phases. This could be inferred because the POST-ASS phase contained more social than educational contributions, which was a clear shift from the former three phases. The L2 contributions – mainly educationally

[83] Their participants namely produced less extensive and less complex contributions when writing an introduction text about themselves than about a piece of art they liked, which the researchers regard as a distinction between more personal and more educational writing.
[84] Which is due to the fact that the participants in the present study are monolingual in Dutch, while the participants of Liaw & English (2013) had different language backgrounds (French and Taiwanese), and had to use English as a lingua franca.
[85] Algorithm: 0.4*((words/sentences)+100*(complex words [with more than three syllables]/words)) (Gunning 1968).

relevant – so became more complex and less readable, as the students themselves posted these questions mostly without a clear educational incentive.

These findings support the argument that an educationally integrated[86] Facebook forum for peer-to-peer communication entails an educational and social communicative purpose. Purposes which influence the participants' language use to such an extent that they code-switch between their L1 and their L2. Furthermore, it has been observed that participants convey more course-related information when using English in their contributions than when using Dutch. These findings were analysed by comparing the contribution length, which entailed the L1 as well as the L2 contributions, with the language complexity of the L2 contributions. This comparative analysis showed that while the contribution length decreased across the four phases of the project, the language complexity of the L2 contributions, in particular, increased. This entails a shift in the attitude of the students when considering their language use in particular and peer-to-peer communication in general when the purpose of interaction is concerned. When considering the students' metacognitive strategies and their self-efficacy, it could be inferred that the knowledge of cognition, as well as the regulation of cognition were differently realised when these two communicative purposes are concerned. This indicates that students are well aware of the overall purpose of such an environment, as well as the metacognitive strategies they have to apply. The realisation of these findings, namely the students' language use, appears therefore to be adapted as the communicative purpose changes; a tendency which is fostered by an online environment where different incentives are at hand.

[86] In which a tutor or lecturer is absent and which contains an educational incentive, mostly in the form of a task-based approach.

4. Qualitative analysis

The analysis of the participants' language evolution across the four phases of the project indicated that the AW Facebook forum has two main communicative purposes, a social one and an educational one. Students appear to adapt their language use to the two kinds of incentives these communicative purposes entail. Furthermore, they tend to use more complex language when producing educational contributions, and less complex and more accessible language when producing social contributions[87]. The purpose of the qualitative enquiry is to gauge to what extent these findings of the quantitative analysis are represented in the actual contributions by conducting a content analysis[88]. The contributions were evaluated by determining their educationally- or socially-based content[89] in order to verify their communicative purpose in each of the four phases of the project. The second part of the analysis comprises an enquiry into the students' attitudes towards the use of the AW Facebook forum in an educational environment. This was undertaken in order to determine their overall sentiment and sense of comfort on the forum as well as their assessment of the peer-to-peer communication, including an evaluation of their peers, their language use and of the content generated by the participants (UGC). The two questionnaires also highlight students' attitudes towards their own participation and their personal engagement as part of the analysis on perceived self-efficacy. The enquiry studies how they perceive the regulation of cognition[90] and how they represent themselves to their peers in the collaborative online space of the forum.

Finally, students' attitudes toward the potential role of a lecturer/tutor and the educational institution in the online environment of Facebook were analysed as this provides an extensive overview of the way in which students perceive the online format and its educational purpose, as well as their own learner autonomy. The qualitative analysis will try to assess and support the findings of the quantitative analysis by showing how a possible shift in the communicative purpose of the forum has been realised by the adoption of different educational and social incentives which, in turn, have caused a change in participants' online language use.

4.1 Content analysis

The content analysis of the Facebook contributions is intended to shed more light on the findings of the quantitative analysis as it gauges to what extent they were actually educationally or socially relevant. In the quantitative enquiry, the arguments indicate that a shift in students' online language use occurred due to the two different incentives they received across the four phases of the project. The educational incentive resulted from a task-

[87] As in the previous arguments, language is denoted as online written language.
[88] The content analysis consists of the identification of each contribution as 'social' or 'educational', depending on the content of the postings. This analysis was conducted by labelling each contribution separately. The labels 'social' and 'educational' are determined in 4.1.1 Educational vs. social contributions.
[89] See 4.2 Educational vs. social contributions.
[90] As part of their overall metacognitive strategies. This therefore includes their perceived-self efficacy, but also their attitude towards the use of the AW Facebook forum, as both indicate how they perceive their own knowledge and to what extent they are aware of their regulation of that knowledge (realised partially in their language use).

based approach and was intended to yield more educational language activity through peer-to-peer communication in the AW Facebook forum. The social incentives are part of the social features of the Facebook format such as identity building, interpersonal interaction and UGC[91]. Both incentives were present in the AW Facebook forum during the THA phases of the project and so might have influenced participants' communicative strategies which, in turn, have caused the language use of the participants to change across these three phases of the project. By excluding the educational incentive during the POST-ASS phase, it was observed that the change in communicative strategy also had an impact on the participants' online language use. Foremost the shift in the use of the students' L1; the decreasing contribution length and the increasing lexical density of the L2 contributions support this argument. In order to further explore this argumentation, the content analysis consists of two inquiries: one into the educational and social character of the contributions made across the four phases of the project, and the other into the difference in language (L1 or L2) and the online language use (contribution length, complexity, readability) these two types of contributions entail.

4.2 Educational vs. social contributions

First, the study of the contributions' social and educational character is subdivided into the analysis of the four separate phases of the project. The four phases entail an evolution in participants' language use and, consequently, might also entail a shift in communicative purpose of the contributions themselves. By analysing and comparing the educational and social character of the peer-to-peer communication, it will be possible to assess the overall communicative purpose of the four phases of the project, as well as the linguistic characteristics of the contributions. When addressing linguistic characteristics, the decrease in contribution length, the increase in the use of students' L1 and the increase in L2 language complexity across the four phases of the project are analysed. All contributions were processed and listed as 'educational' or 'social', according to their general communicative purpose. An educational contribution consists exclusively of information that focuses on the course content of the university's curriculum or on enhancing the content, formulation or structure of the students' writing assignments (i.e. THAs). Educationally relevant communication is stimulated by the educational incentive of the THAs, and addresses *All Write* course topics, topics of additional courses or questions on the content and structure of the writing assignments. Because of the lack of an educational incentive in the POST-ASS phase, contributions which focus on the course content of the students' examinations were also included. The social contributions consist of course-related postings, such as postings on the objectives of the courses, assignment deadlines and the organisation of the university's curriculum; but also non-course-related postings such as the organisation of group events, questions and notes about social matters and general pastime. When comparing the four phases of the project two distinctive tendencies can be observed. These are represented in table 13.

[91] See 1.1 Web 2.0 and social media.

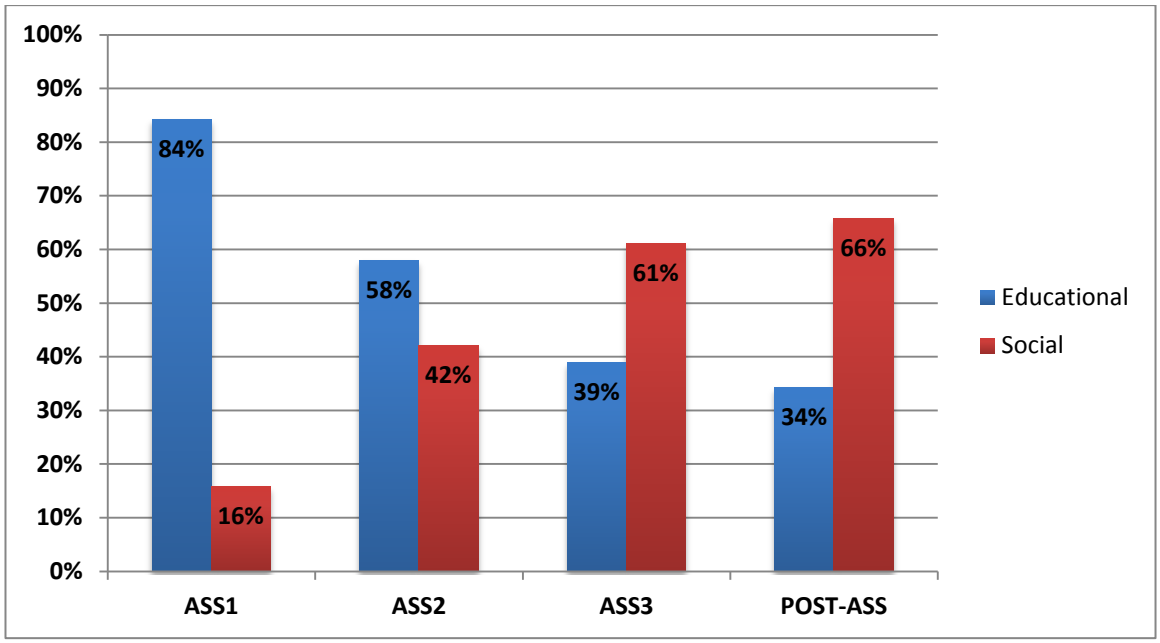
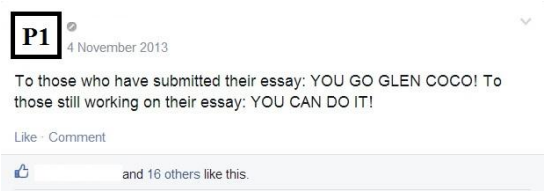


Table 13: percentage of contributions with an educational and social character on the AW Facebook forum

In ASS1 84.2% of the contributions were mainly educationally led and primarily entailed questions, replies or remarks about topics of the *All Write* course or the content of the first THA[92]. Furthermore, 15.8% were social contributions which did not regard these topics and comprise mainly course-related postings on the course's objectives and the deadline for the first THA. Various social contributions also contained notes that strengthened the group identity of the community of practice. A prototypical example of this tendency is the students' encouragement of their peers[93] and the participants' tokens of gratitude after a question had been answered[94]. A total of 70 comments contained tokens of gratitude in ASS1[95]. It is safe to infer that participants were respectful of their peers' contributions, which is beneficial for their group identity. This practice could possibly also foster educationally led peer-to-peer communication, as participants are encouraged by their peers to reply to their postings. The social character of the AW Facebook forum could therefore be regarded as a constructive incentive to maintain peer-to-peer communication, encourage good performance[96] and avoid communication breakdown.

[92] See Conversation 11.
[93] See Conversation 9.
[94] See Conversation 10.
[95] Which equals 8.5% of the overall contributions, or 53.8% of the social contributions.
[96] Of which Conversation 9 is a prototypical example.

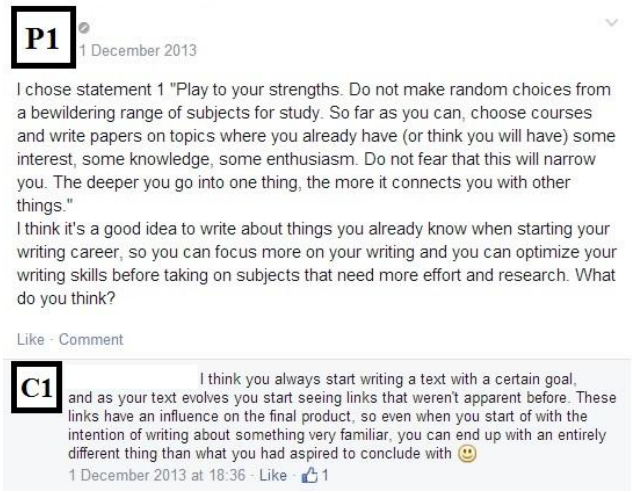


Conversation 9: social contribution ASS1

Conversation 10: social contributions ASS1

Conversation 11: educational contribution ASS1

As shown in table 13, ASS2 has an overall educational character (57.8%) but the number of social contributions (42.2%) increased considerably in comparison to ASS1. Contributions also became shorter during ASS2 and the complexity of the L2 contributions increased. While the first tendency indicates that the contributions in ASS2 contained less information in comparison to ASS1, the latter tendency indicates that there was a slight increase in L2 language complexity, which results in more informative L2 contributions. However, when looking at the communicative purpose of the contributions, it becomes clear that a higher number of social contributions were made during ASS2 in comparison to ASS1. Due to the fact that two different tendencies can be observed and, additionally, that there are two different communicative purposes, it could be inferred that the higher number of educational contributions is responsible for the increase of L2 language complexity, whereas the increased number of social contributions is responsible for the decrease in overall contribution length in comparison to ASS1. This could mean that while the overall contributions became shorter, language complexity of the educational L2 contributions held strong. The tendencies of sentence length and complexity might then indicate that the students' educational contributions became more concise, as they were able to convey more information by using less extensive phrases. A representative example of an educational contribution in ASS2 is shown in conversation 12.



Conversation 12: educational contributions ASS2

The conversation contains both long and complex sentences as two participants discuss the content of P1's individual writing assignment. Despite the use of an emoticon[97] the overall language use is rather extensive and contains a minimal amount of spelling and punctuation errors. When comparing educational contributions with social ones, it could be observed that the latter contain less extensive and complex sentences[98]. This observation might support the argument that the increasing complexity factor of the L2 contributions is due to the fact that they entail more educationally relevant information. Furthermore, social contributions also consist of rather correct language use although the contributions themselves appear to be shorter. A prototypical example of a social contribution in shown in ASS2 is conversation 13 below.

Conversation 13: social contributions ASS2

The educational example in conversation 12, in accordance with conversation 11 in ASS1, seems to confirm the tendency that educational contributions are longer and contain more complex language use than social contributions. The tendency might also provide an

[97] This is regarded as socially oriented communication in computer mediated communication (CMC) (Walther & D'Addario 2001).
[98] See Conversation 13.

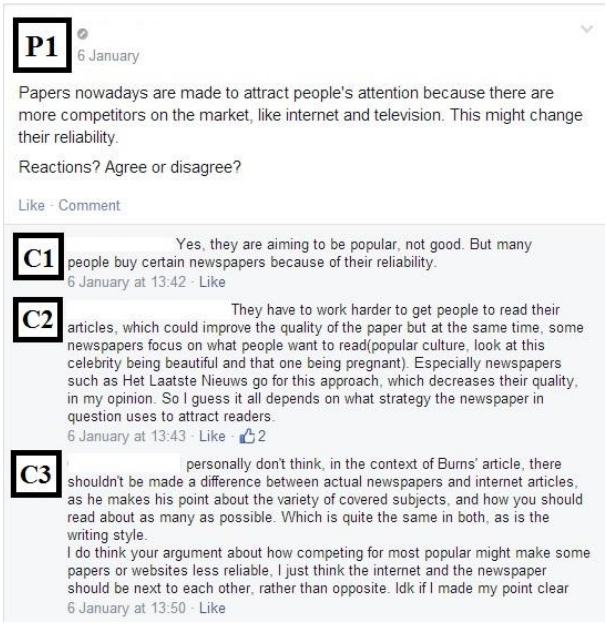
explanation for the increase of the L2 complexity factor between ASS1 and ASS2. However, the increase of 1.5% is rather minimal in comparison to the following two phases of the project[99]. This is possibly due to the fact that ASS1 and ASS2 both contain less socially led than educationally led contributions, so the two phases entail the same overall educational communicative purpose. In addition, the socially led contributions – present in the first two phases of the project – were performed mainly in English. The minor increase in L2 language complexity, in accordance, could be explained by the fact that the L2 contributions in ASS2 still were influenced to a certain extent by social incentives. The observation that the increase of L2 complexity in ASS3 and the POST-ASS phase is much more extensive is probably due to the fact that social contributions in these phases were mainly produced in the L1. In other words, the distinction between social and educational contributions is marked by an increase in L2 language complexity during ASS1 and ASS2. During ASS3 and the POST-ASS phase, the division was enforced by a division between the L1 and the L2, which explains the higher increase of L2 language complexity. Socially led contributions were more frequently performed in the L1 and educationally led contributions were more frequently performed in the L2. Consequently, from ASS3 onwards, the L2 contributions were less influenced by the social incentives. This argument indicates that students appear well aware of their communication strategies when contributing content to the AW Facebook forum[100]. Furthermore, it was also observed that social contributions received more replies than educational ones. This is visible both in conversation 13 as well as in the following examples of conversations. The analysis of the educational and social contributions in the last two phases of the project will further support the argumentation on a shift in the communicative purpose of the contributions in the AW Facebook forum, which is reflected in the students' online language use[101].

In ASS3 the social contributions (61.1%) outnumber the educational ones (38.9%). In other words, there were more contributions which did not exclusively entail educationally relevant information about the content or material of the *All Write* course or about the THAs. This might explain the overall decrease in contribution length in ASS3 in comparison to the other two THA phases, as more socially relevant contributions were produced. However, it has also been observed that in ASS3 the L2 language complexity significantly increased in comparison to the other two THA phases. The tendencies observed might further support the argument that educational contributions are more complex than social contributions in ASS1, ASS2 and ASS3. Furthermore, – as it was observed in ASS3 – all educational contributions were performed in English and a growing number of social contributions were performed in Dutch. Conversation 14 is a representative example of an educational contribution in ASS3.

[99] This entails an increase of 5.0% and 18.9% accordingly. L2 complexity: ASS1 (26.4%), ASS2 (27.9%), ASS3 (32.9%), POST-ASS (51.8%).

[100] This results in a clear metacognitive strategy of the students to regulate their knowledge in a particular way by mainly applying the L2 to share a certain kind of information while applying the L1 to share another.

[101] As their online language use is a representation or realisation of the communicative purpose and of their communicative strategy.



Conversation 14: educational contributions ASS3

The educational contributions are rather extensive and contain complex language use in comparison to the social contributions in ASS3. Furthermore, the contributions in ASS3 contain more and more Dutch[102]. A representative example of a social contribution in ASS3 is conversation 15.

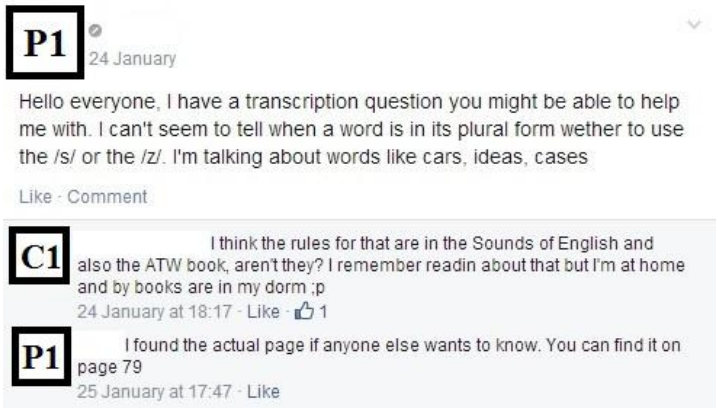
Conversation 15: social contributions ASS3

The fact that social contributions outnumber the educational ones in ASS3 might be a strong indication of why this phase comprises 9.4% L1 contributions. The given examples support the argument that in ASS3 educational contributions are performed mainly in the L2 whereas the tendency to perform social contributions in the L1 increased. However, the cross-over from an educational to a social purpose of the AW Facebook forum in ASS3 appears to yield an additional tendency. It is possible that, because the social and educational contributions became more divided between the L1 and the L2, the increase in L2 language complexity between ASS2 and ASS3 was considerably higher than between ASS1 and ASS2[103].

[102] A total of 9.4% of the overall contributions, see 3.4 L1 fallback.
[103] An increase of 5.0% between ASS2 and ASS3 in comparison to the increase of 1.5% between ASS1 and ASS2.

Contribution length in ASS3 decreased while the L2 contributions had a higher complexity factor than in the two previous THA phases. In addition, the tendency that social contributions outnumber the educational ones in ASS3 and that they were more and more performed in the L1[104], might indicate that participants became acculturated to the AW Facebook forum and used it as a platform for social interaction in addition to an educational forum. This supports the argument that students might become more engaged with their online language use, as the AW Facebook forum could also be used as a social safety net in their education. A comparative analysis with the POST-ASS phase will have to provide further support for this argument as the POST-ASS phase lacks an educational incentive and the social contributions outnumbered the educational ones by two to one.

Conversation 16: educational contributions POST-ASS



Conversation 17: educational contributions POST-ASS

In the POST-ASS phase, a considerable increase of social contributions (66.7%) compared with the educational ones (34.3%) can be observed. In addition, students used the L1 (83.1%) significantly more than the L2 (16.9%) to communicate with their peers. The content analysis of the POST-ASS phase indicates that a considerable majority of the social contributions is performed in the L1 whereas a substantial majority of L2 contributions had an educational communicative purpose, of which conversation 16 and 17 are prototypical examples. The argument that social contributions are less complex than educational ones, as the overall contribution length decreased but that at the same time the L2 contributions became considerably more complex, is also in this phase supported by the findings of the content analysis. The L2 contributions became considerably more complex during this phase of the project, as the L2 complexity factor increased with 18.9% in comparison to the L2

[104] This entails more accessible and readable social contributions.

contributions in ASS3 and with over a quarter (25,1%) in comparison to ASS1. The content analysis shows that the main difference between the POST-ASS phase and the three THA phases is that social contributions in the POST-ASS phase consist almost exclusively of L1 contributions, whereas the educational contributions consist almost exclusively of L2 contributions[105]. The observation that the English contributions became more complex across the four phases of the project and the observation that the L2 language complexity in ASS3 and the POST-ASS phase increased considerably more than that of the first two THA phases, might be explained by the fact that, from ASS3 onwards, social contributions were mainly performed in Dutch. Social contributions in the L1 therefore influenced the contribution length of the POST-ASS phase but had no impact on the complexity factor of the L2 contributions. Two prototypical examples of social contributions in the POST-ASS phase are shown in conversation 18 and 19.

Conversation 18: social contributions POST-ASS

[105] A tendency which already has been observed when analysing the L1 and L2 use in the AW Facebook forum and which has now been observed when analysing the social and educational communicative purpose of the forum. Examples of the educational conversations in the POST-ASS phase are conversations 16 and 17 which discuss the content of an upcoming examination.

Conversation 19: social contributions POST-ASS

Conversation 18[106] and 19[107] represent social contributions in the AW Facebook forum. Besides the fact that a vast majority of social contributions are communicated in Dutch, it is also noticeable that the contributions are less extensive in comparison to educational conversations in the POST-ASS[108] or THA phases. The observations of the content analysis further support the findings of the quantitative analysis, which indicated that the overall contributions in the AW Facebook forum became less extensive across the four phases of the project whereas the L2 contributions became more complex and therefore entailed more information. An additional observation indicated that the educational contributions in the AW Facebook forum were foremost performed in the L2 and that the social contributions were foremost performed in the L1. These findings make it possible to infer that a language shift across the four phases of the project has developed over time due to a shift in the communicative purpose of the AW Facebook forum. Following the second phase of the project (ASS2), a cross-over between the social and educational communicative purpose has occurred on the forum. The cross-over in communicative purpose accordingly entailed a shift in online language use[109] and a shift in the students' actual language on the forum[110], as educational communication mostly entails the use of the L1 whereas social communication mainly entails the use of the L2. The latter tendency might also explain why the L2 language complexity increased, as the social L1 contributions did not influence the L2 language complexity, but did, however, influence the overall decrease in contribution length[111].

[106] Conversation 18 can be translated as: 'Dear and concordant Facebook group, I have finished my examinations [...] and have gone back home to Amsterdam [...]' She furthermore asks whether some of her peers want to have a drink when she comes back.
[107] Conversation 19 can be translated as: 'To all Dutchmen: what's the best day to party in Amsterdam? A Friday or a Saturday?'.
[108] See Conversations 16 and 17.
[109] This entails a decrease in overall contribution length.
[110] This entails an increase in the use of the L1 in comparison to the L2.
[111] As social contributions are more accessible and readable than educational contributions (Liaw & English 2013).

4.3 Self-efficacy: students' perception and attitudes

The students perceived self-efficacy was measured by presenting them with two questionnaires. These questionnaires were filled in at the beginning and at the end of the project. The first questionnaire measured how experienced the students were with the use of SNSs and what their opinion was on the use of Facebook in an educational environment. The second measured to what extent the students considered the AW Facebook forum to be of any educational value, how they perceived the interaction with their peers and how they perceived their gain in knowledge and writing skills through an active participation on the online format[112]. The first questionnaire was completed by the students before the Facebook project was introduced and the second was completed just before the deadline of the last THA (ASS3) – at the end of the *All Write* course. Accordingly, the answers provided by the students have to be regarded as perceptions and opinions of the AW Facebook forum while it still contained an educational incentive[113]. The study of students' attitudes furthermore consists of their answers to the second questionnaire which employed a five-point Likert scale to gauge their attitude and perception[114].

First, the students' overall perception of the AW Facebook forum was measured. They were asked in the second questionnaire whether they liked being part of the AW Facebook forum. One-fifth of the students did not like (12.6%) or not like at all (7.6%) being part of the forum, while a majority indicated they did (50.4%) or did so very much (11.8%). One-fifth (17.6%) did not have an opinion on this matter. The score of 2.54 on the Likert scale indicates that a majority of the students liked being part of the AW Facebook forum[115]. The students were also asked why they liked or disliked being part of the online collaborative environment. The reason why people liked being on the forum was the fact that it made them interact with their peers and provided a strong community feeling. Most of them also remarked that it was interesting to know their fellow students' opinion on different linguistic topics, and they had the feeling they had a forum where they were able to ask 'stupid questions' about the *All Write* course and their THAs. Furthermore, in the AW Facebook forum itself contributions appeared on how students felt being part of the project. The student (P1) in conversation 20 discusses the fact that the forum really helped her during examinations. The student (P1) in conversation 21 discusses the fact that the exams, in addition to the discussions on the AW Facebook forum, made her feel comfortable in the online community of practice. It can also be observed that this post received 414 replies, which indicates that the community of students seem to be engaged when discussing such social topics.

[112] Which all contribute to their perceived self-efficacy, as it gauges to what extent they consider their online participation as being beneficial for their learning curve.
[113] The original questionnaires, as well as the results of the inquiries are included in Appendix 2: questionnaires.
[114] For the tables of the findings of the post-questionnaire: see Appendix 5.
[115] A five-point Likert scale provides a score between 1 and 5 which indicates to what extent students agree or disagree with a statement; 3 is the mean of the measure, as 1 is 'strongly agree', 5 is 'strongly disagree'. The lower the measure, the more students agree with the statement and vice versa.

Conversation 20: positive attitute towards the use of the AW Facebook forum POST-ASS[116]

Conversation 21: positive attitude towards the use of the AW Facebook forum POST-ASS

Students who did not like being on the AW Facebook forum indicated that they felt required to contribute and that they felt obliged by the educational institution to collaborate with their peers on an SNS such as Facebook. It invaded their personal online environment and it forced them to interact with people they did not want to interact with[117].

4.3.1 The educational forum

A vast majority of the students (84.9%)[118] regarded the AW Facebook forum as an educational collaborative space where they were able to interact with their peers about the course content of *All Write* and where they could exchange experiences and questions about their writing assignments. They also indicated that the forum was occasionally used to provide additional information about other courses, which was beneficial for their overall learning curve. As observed in the content analysis of the POST-ASS phase, the forum also

[116] The post of P1 can be translated as: 'This forum has really helped me a lot, woehoew aced my exams! Dancing and drinking beers it is Friday'.
[117] For a more elaborate discussion about the students' perception of forced contributions, see 4.3.1.1 Peer-to-peer communication.
[118] As 8.4% strongly agreed and 76.5% agreed with the statement that the forum was used for educational purposes, whereas 5.9% disagreed or 0.8% strongly disagreed. A total of 8.4% did not have an opinion about this statement. The Likert scale score of 2.14 indicates that students perceived the AW Facebook forum as having an educational purpose.

provided additional information for the students' upcoming examinations. A minority of the students (6.7%) indicated that the AW Facebook forum had a more social than educational purpose. They argue that it is impossible to take the social aspects out of social media, even if it is used in an educational environment. In general, the students regarded the forum as having an educational purpose and remarked that the occasional social interaction during the THA phases was a nice break from the educationally led discussions. Students' attitudes support the argument that the AW Facebook forum had an educational communicative purpose, which in the three THA phases is also noticeable in their L2 use. Their perception on the occasional social contributions might also support the argument that social contributions enhanced the educational peer-to-peer communication as it fostered community building, but also provided students with a breather during educational discussions, which might have enhanced their focus on the educational content.

A majority of students (56.3%)[119] indicated that the AW Facebook forum helped them to better understand what writing in an academic context is about – one of the main course objectives of *All Write*. Furthermore, one-third (32.8%) indicated that the AW Facebook forum did not help them to better understand this aspect of academic discourse and argued that foremost the face-to-face instruction in class provided them with the necessary knowledge. The purpose of the AW Facebook forum in a blended learning environment nevertheless was to enhance the students' understanding of writing in an academic context, an objective which according to the findings has been achieved for a majority of the students.

4.3.1.1 Peer-to-peer communication

The students' attitude towards peer-to-peer communication and their opinion on their peers' contribution to the content, formulation and overall structure of their THAs were also gauged in the second questionnaire. When students were asked what their peers contributed to the personal writing assignments, a majority (66.1%)[120] indicated that they helped them to improve the content of their THAs while a minority (22.8%) indicated that their peers did not contribute anything content wise. Furthermore, more than half of the students (54.3%)[121] indicated that their peers contributed to the formulation of their writing assignments, providing them with synonyms or academically acceptable vocabulary. A minority (37.3%), however, indicated that they did not contribute anything to the formulation of their THAs. Finally, approximately one-third of the students (35.6%)[122] indicated that their peers helped them improve the structure of their writing assignments by providing extra information on the different academic building blocks. Less than half (48.3%) indicated that this was not the

[119] As 56.3% agreed with the statement whereas 30.3% disagreed and 2.5% strongly disagreed. A total of 10.9% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 2.79 indicates that a majority agreed with the statement.
[120] As 7.6% strongly agreed and 58.5% agreed with the statement whereas 20.3% disagreed and 2.5% strongly disagreed. A total of 11.0% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 2.52 indicates that a majority agrees with the statement.
[121] As 6.8% strongly agreed and 47.5% agreed with the statement whereas 33.1% disagreed and 4.2% strongly disagreed. A total of 8.5% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 2.81 indicates that a majority agrees with the statement.
[122] As 2.5% strongly agreed and 33.1% agreed with the statement whereas 44.1% disagreed and 4.2% strongly disagreed. A total of 16.1% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 3.14 indicates that a majority does not agree with the statement.

case. The students therefore indicate that their peers mainly contributed to the content of their writing assignments by discussing variable language points and sharing their opinions, while a majority indicates that their peers contributed to the formulation of the individual writing assignments and less than half of them indicated that their peers contributed to the structure of the assignments.

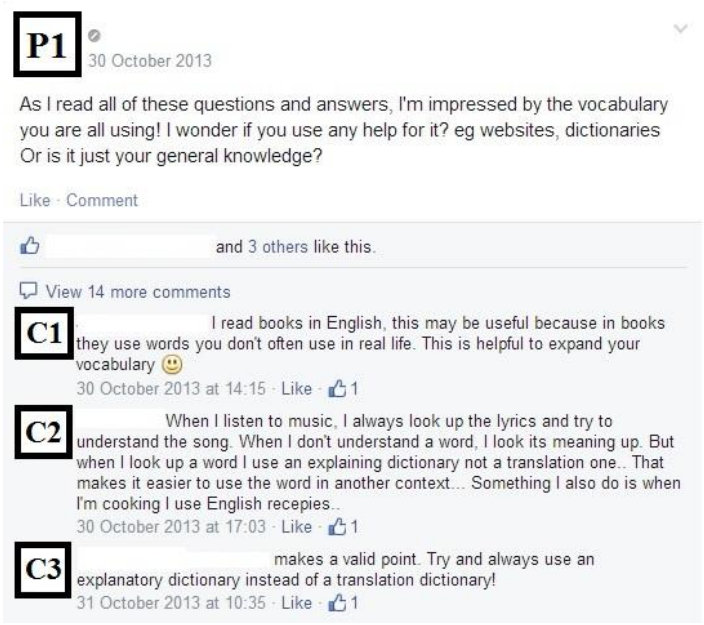
Almost two-thirds of the students on the AW Facebook forum (63.0%)[123] felt comfortable discussing their THAs with their peers on the forum as opposed to about a quarter (26.9%) who did not. Furthermore, more than half of the students (56.3%)[124] felt comfortable writing their THAs after discussing their questions with their peers on the forum, whereas less than a fifth (19.3%) did not. Students who did not feel comfortable discussing their THAs mainly indicated that they felt judged by their peers or that they did not like the fact that they were required to contribute to the AW Facebook forum. The task-based approach is mainly responsible for the latter, as it was part of the assignment description to discuss their THAs. However, in order to assure educationally led communication in an unrestricted online environment, such an approach is essential (Thompson & MacDonald 2005). In addition, the students' opinion of the educational purpose of the AW Facebook forum and peer-to-peer communication is exemplified by conversation 22, which discusses a question from one of a student on the overall attitude of his peers towards the AW Facebook forum.

Conversation 22: enquiry into attitudes towards the use of the AW Facebook forum

Participants on the AW Facebook forum considered the use of the L2 by their peers as being of a high standard. McBride (2009) argues that the involvement of a native speaker in such online environments is necessary to guarantee the authenticity and correctness of the

[123] As 9.2% strongly agreed and 53.8% agreed with the statement whereas 19.3% disagreed and 7.6% strongly disagreed. A total of 10.1% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 2.62 indicates that a majority agrees with the statement.
[124] As 4.2 strongly agreed and 52.1% agreed with the statement whereas 16.5% disagreed and 2.5% strongly disagreed. A total of 24.4% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 2.61 indicates that a majority agrees with the statement.

interactions. However, the students themselves indicate that such an involvement is not necessary, as they experience their peers' contributions as adequate language use, as is exemplified in conversation 23 below.



Conversation 23: positive attitude towards the L2 language use on the AW Facebook forum

The students' attitudes towards peer-to-peer communication is therefore positive as a majority indicated that their peers generally contributed useful information to their individual writing assignments and that they considered their L2 proficiency in the AW Facebook forum as adequate. However, some students felt obliged to join the forum or to contribute information. Although the contribution pressure was already reduced by excluding a lecturer/tutor from the online project, the task-based approach appeared to add pressure to the students' communication and engagement on the forum. Nevertheless, a vast majority of the students felt comfortable engaging in the peer-to-peer communication, which is an important factor when a communicative language learning approach is promoted.

4.3.1.2 Personal engagement

In the second questionnaire, students were asked what they thought about their own personal engagement and what they thought they had gained from participating on the forum. While one-fifth (20.2%)[125] indicated that they became more skilled in academic writing due to their active participation on the forum, more than half (52.1%) indicated that this was not the case. Students who felt that they had not become more skilled in academic writing point out that they learned more about academic discourse from face-to-face instruction in class. Nevertheless, the observed tendencies in the quantitative and qualitative analysis raise the argument that their L2 proficiency has improved during the process of the project. However, in the tertiary educational environment many factors may have had an impact on the proficiency, fluency and accuracy of the students' L2, including the face-to-face instruction

[125] As 20.2% agreed with the statement whereas 47.1% disagreed and 5.0% strongly disagreed. A total of 27.7% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 3.37 indicates that a majority does not agree with the statement.

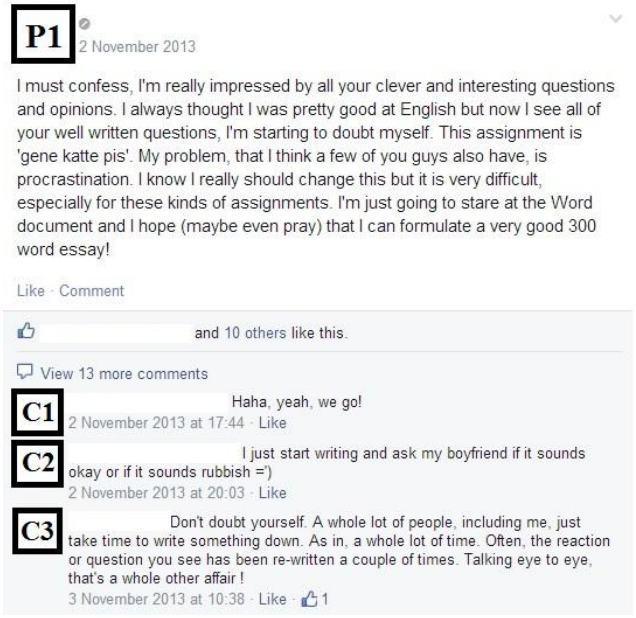
in the FLL classroom. Further research will have to determine to what extent online peer-to-peer communication influences this tendency, whether positively or negatively.

More than one-third (38.2%)[126] of the students indicated that they gained more confidence in discussing language topics due to their active participation on the AW Facebook forum, whereas less than one-third (31.1%) indicated that this was not the case. In addition, more than one third (33.9%)[127] of the participants indicated that they gained more confidence in academic writing due to their active participation on the forum, whereas less than half (41.5%) indicated they did not. Of the participants who indicated they did not gain any confidence on both levels argue that foremost the face-to-face instruction in class generated confidence gain as it provided them with the necessary information and knowledge to perform the tasks. Some students indicated that they felt threatened by the contributions and opinions of their peers. A tendency which made them feel less confident about their own knowledge and writing skills, as is exemplified in conversation 24[128]. The student indicates that all the different voices and opinions on the AW Facebook forum have confused her.

Conversation 24: negative attitude towards the use of the AW Facebook forum

However, as conversations 20, 21 and 23 exemplify, a majority of the students had a positive attitude towards the UGC, the peer-to-peer interaction and the L2 proficiency of their peers on the AW Facebook forum. An additional example of students positive attitude towards the forum is conversation 25, which is a contribution from ASS1.

[126] As 6.8% strongly agreed and 31.4% agreed with the statement whereas 25.4% disagreed and 5.9% strongly disagreed. A total of 30.5% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 2.92 indicates that a majority agrees with the statement.
[127] As 3.4% strongly agreed and 30.5% agreed with the statement whereas 34.7% disagreed and 6.8% strongly disagreed. A total of 24.6% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 3.11 indicates that a majority does not agree with the statement.
[128] The post (P1) of conversation 24 can be translated as: 'I thought I understood everything and then the All Write Solidarity Forum ruined it'.



Conversation 25: positive attitude towards the content on the AW Facebook forum, ASS1

In order to create an extensive view on student participation, not only the active but also the passive engagement was gauged. Students were asked if they read other people's posts and discussions on the AW Facebook forum in order to learn more about academic writing. Almost three-quarters (72.9%)[129] of them indicated that they did and so obtained more knowledge about the course through a passive use of the collaborative space. A tendency which Zourou (2012) refers to as 'lurking' (4). In addition, one-fifth (20.3%) of the participants indicated that they did look at their peers' contributions. Looking at other people's contributions could be regarded as the use and re-use of UGC, which is one of the main aspects of SNSs[130] and is exemplified in the present study by the high number of students who indicated they gained knowledge through passive participation. Students on the forum accordingly appeared to use the social incentives of the SNS in order to enhance the educational purpose of the format.

Finally, the students were asked if they had provided extra information (additional to replying on assignment questions at least once, which was required by the task-based approach) for their peers during the course of the project. The question gauged to what extent the students themselves took up the role of a lecturer/tutor during peer-to-peer communication. A minority (42.9%)[131] of the participants indicated that they provided additional support for their peers whereas more than one-third (40.4%) indicated they did not. The score of 2.95 on the Likert scale indicates that a slight majority of the students took up the role of a lecturer/tutor on the AW Facebook forum. By doing so, they appeared to be

[129] As 16.1% strongly agreed and 56.8% agreed with the statement whereas 16.9% disagreed and 3.4% strongly disagreed. A total of 6.8% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 2.35 indicates that a majority agrees with the statement.
[130] See 1.1 Web 2.0 and social media.
[131] As 8.4% strongly agreed and 34.5% agreed with the statement whereas 34.5% disagreed and 5.9% strongly disagreed. A total of 16.8% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 2.95 indicates that a slight majority agrees with the statement.

aware of the educational value of peer-to-peer communication, of the educational purpose of the AW Facebook forum and of their perceived self-efficacy[132].

4.3.2 The absence of a lecturer/tutor

The students were asked whether they felt monitored by a member of the educational institution during their participation on the AW Facebook forum. If so, the language use of the participants might have been influenced as the presence of a lecturer/tutor entails contribution pressure and target language anxiety. Nevertheless, a vast minority (5.2%)[133] of the participants indicated they felt monitored by a member of the educational institution, whereas about three-quarters (72.4%) indicated that this was not the case. When looking at the comment section, those students who did feel monitored argued that they felt monitored by their fellow students. The majority, who did not feel monitored, argued that there were clearly no lecturers/tutors present on the AW Facebook forum. One student pointed out that he was aware of the presence of the MA student in the project, but that he did not feel monitored by him. The replies indicate that students did not feel pressured by the presence of the MA student, which was the primary reason for including him in the project in place of the lecturer/tutor.

The students' opinion of the presence of a lecturer/tutor in the project was measured by asking them whether they thought it would have been appropriate for a lecturer/tutor to join the AW Facebook forum. Less than a quarter of the participants (23.3%)[134] indicated that it would be appropriate whereas half of them (50.2%) indicated that it would not be appropriate. The students argue that the presence of a lecturer/tutor would add pressure to the peer-to-peer communication and point out that members of the educational staff should remain professional and should not use SNSs to communicate with their students. Blackboard, the online communication tool of the University of Antwerp, is more appropriate for that purpose. Furthermore, half of the participants (50.4%)[135] indicated that the presence of a lecturer/tutor on the AW Facebook forum would have influenced their participation whereas about one-third (30.7%) indicated it would not have had any impact on their communicative strategies. A majority of the students further argued that the presence of a lecturer/tutor would hamper peer-to-peer communication and that they would feel less comfortable discussing their writing assignments or any course-related content. In other words, the possibility of asking 'stupid questions' would be impaired. The students who indicated that the presence of a lecturer/tutor would not influence their participation argue that the forum already had an educational character and that it would not have made a difference whether there was a lecturer/tutor present or not. In general, the students do not

[132] As students seem to be aware of the educational environment the AW Facebook forum entails and on their personal role in the peer-to-peer communication.
[133] As 5.2% agreed with the statement whereas 51.7% disagreed and 20.7% strongly disagreed. A total of 22.4% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 3.88 indicates that a vast majority does not agree with the statement.
[134] As 2.6% strongly agreed and 20.7% agreed with the statement whereas 39.7% disagreed and 10.3% strongly disagreed. A total of 26.7% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 3.34 indicates that a majority does not agree with the statement.
[135] As 11.1% strongly agreed and 39.3% agreed with the statement whereas 25.6% disagreed and 5.1% strongly disagreed. A total of 18.8% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 2.74 indicates that a majority agrees with the statement.

prefer the presence of a lecturer/tutor in the online collaborative environment of Facebook as it would reduce their sense of comfort, hamper peer-to-peer communication and increase target language anxiety[136].

4.3.3 The role of the educational institution

The students' attitudes towards the use of Facebook in the language learning classroom, as well as their attitudes towards the role of the educational institution were measured. Two-thirds of the participants (65.6%)[137] indicated that a Facebook forum could be useful in SLL/FLL whereas a vast minority (8.4%) indicated that they disagreed with this statement. Students who believe a Facebook forum could be useful argue that the social and interactional context of such an environment, in particular, would be beneficial in acquiring a foreign language. Furthermore, less than half of the participants (41.9%)[138] indicated that students should use Facebook as a tool in their overall education, while less than one-third (28.8%) disagreed. Students who agreed with the statement argue that Facebook could serve as a collaborative environment for peers to share information and post course-related questions. It could also serve as an online safety net for particular questions about deadlines, examination schedules and moral support. The participants furthermore indicated that students should not be required to join such an environment or should not be obliged to contribute any content, as it would hamper communication and cause a multitude of uninteresting and useless questions and replies. Some of the students indicated that this was already the case in the AW Facebook forum. Students appear to be well aware of the purpose of the AW Facebook forum as a majority indicates that such a platform should be used as a collaborative environment among peers[139].

The last question of the second questionnaire asked the students whether the educational institution should support recourses on Facebook in order to stimulate peer-to-peer learning[140]. Less than half of the participants (45.3%)[141] agreed with the statement, while just over a quarter (28.2%) did not believe that the institution should support it. Students in general argue that social tools are the future of learning, but that the educational institution should beware not to risk its high professional status by including SNSs and social tools in their curriculum. Further research will have to point out which role an educational institution

[136] Furthermore, a student poll on the AW Facebook forum asked what they thought about meeting a lecturer/tutor outside of the classroom, see appendix 6: conversation 1. Most of the respondents indicated that they would not do so because they do not believe it is appropriate. They also indicated that they would not know what to say to them and that the lecturer/tutor does not want to know them either.

[137] As 11.8% strongly agreed and 53.8% agreed with the statement whereas 5.0% disagreed and 3.4% strongly disagreed. A total of 26.1% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 2.34 indicates that a majority agrees with the statement.

[138] As 6.0% strongly agreed and 35.9% agreed with the statement whereas 22.2% disagreed and 6.8% strongly disagreed. A total of 29.1% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 2.88 indicates that a majority agrees with the statement.

[139] By analysing their responses, it could be inferred that a minority of the students tend to favour the passive use and passive knowledge gain in the online educational environment.

[140] Which is a learning strategy based on shared knowledge and information review through peer-to-peer communication and peer-assessment (Yang 2006).

[141] As 6.0% strongly agreed and 39.3% agreed with the statement whereas 17.9% disagreed and 10.3% strongly disagreed. A total of 26.5% did not have an opinion. The Likert scale score of 2.87 indicates that a majority agrees with the statement.

and its members of staff should adopt when integrating online collaborative spaces such as SNSs into the educational programme.

5. Suggestions for further research

The present study is a case study which investigates the educational value of Facebook in the FLL classroom and is a first step in trying to understand students' metacognitive strategies when they engage in autonomous online peer-to-peer communication. Bringing the students' everyday experience of social media into an educational setting is an attempt towards harmonising learning and online communication. However, the study is a pilot study and various elements and variables need further exploration. Next to several research topics, already hinted at in the present study, I will highlight some potential topics for further research in the following paragraphs.

In this study on the communicative purpose and the corresponding communicative strategies in the AW Facebook forum, I collected quantitative communication data from the online forum as well as qualitative data through two questionnaires on students' self-perceived attitudes. Although the findings of the qualitative and quantitative data were both analysed and provided further insight into the value of a Facebook forum in the FLL classroom, it is not possible to gauge to what extent such an environment has an influence on students' educational output. The present study did not contain a control group to assess the actual learning outcome of the students' peer-to-peer communication in the collaborative online space as opposed to students devoid of this tool. It is therefore not possible to measure or verify the actual educational value the online environment or the effect of the peer-to-peer communication, as actual learning gain was not investigated. Neither is it possible to make claims on the evolution of their L2 language proficiency, communication or even writing skills. However, the data on students' perceived self-efficacy, together with the findings of the quantitative analysis, do provide strong indications that the AW Facebook forum was an efficient peer-to-peer communication format which entailed an educational communicative purpose. Moreover, since the students attributed high face validity to the education value and effect of the forum, it might also have a positive influence on students' actual learning output.

Students' online language use was investigated by analysing contribution length, language complexity (as expressed through lexical density), readability (as reflected in a Gunning-Fog index) and L1 fallback. These language features were analysed because they are part of the surface structure of online language use and provide more insight into identity building and language socialisation in addition to the analysis of the linguistic features themselves. The features were accessible, which facilitated the process of gaining further understanding of students' communicative and metacognitive strategies. However, the analysis of language and language use has not been carried out in an exhaustive way and (foreign language) communicative strategies (Færch & Kasper 1989) should be further investigated. Since accuracy, fluency and specifically lexical diversity are important characteristics of complex and informative language use, they need to be further investigated as measures of second language performance (cf. Skehan 2009) and more particular as indicators of students' longitudinal (online) language evolution.

The analysis of participants' online language use raises a further issue: Which linguistic features actually characterise educationally led communication on an SNS platform? As social and educational incentives influence participants' language use, it is unclear to what extent they enhance or hamper peer-to-peer communication. An in-depth analysis of

students' genuine online language use, which the corpus of this study provides, will have to be carried out in order to make further claims on linguistic as well as communicative features of students' educationally led communication on an unrestricted social platform. Following Xu & Van de Poel (2011; and Van de Poel's personal communication), it has to be noted that students might well experience a dichotomy between the use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in their social lives and English as a second language (ESL) in their academic environment. This hypothesis could be further explored and tested on the basis of the corpus that the present study provides.

In this thesis I also investigated how students' perceived self-efficacy and metacognitive strategies evolved while participating in the AW Facebook forum. As the study provides strong indications of a shift in communicative strategies, it is not clear to what extent this shift is represented in students' metacognitive strategies. As social and educational incentives are part of the collaborative environment, it has to be further studied how both influence the students' knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition. The students' perceived self-efficacy already provided several insights into a possible metacognitive shift, but these findings were, as the term indicates, the students' own perception. It is therefore unclear to what extent students are aware of their own communicative and metacognitive strategies. It is thus necessary to investigate to what extent students are explicitly aware of their own communicative and metacognitive strategies, without however having to explicitly identify them, in order to be able to gauge to what extent online peer-to-peer communication enhances or undermines their perceived self-efficacy.

The present study applied a task-based approach as an educational incentive in the AW Facebook forum. The tasks consisted of individual writing assignments with peer review on which the students had to report in the online environment of Facebook. The task description intentionally left room for interpretation and had the purpose of letting students share their own opinion and experience in order to foster more dynamic peer-to-peer communication. Although the description yielded a certain kind of interaction, it thus also provided enough openness to keep communication interesting. From a pedagogical perspective, it may be interesting to study what kind of task-based approach is most effective in an SNS environment to foster both educational and engaged peer-to-peer communication.

A last topic which might benefit from further study is more social and psychological in nature. Online personal identity and community building are both essential building blocks of the SNS environment. Community building and strong social ties enhance peer-to-peer communication, but it needs to be further specified how participants' online personal identity is influenced by integrating SNSs into an educational environment and to what extent students' online identity could be changed by this practice. It might be the case that participants alter their personal engagement with the SNS because of a formal, anti-social environment, or switch communicative strategies, not only while engaging on the forum, but also further in their personal online network. This phenomenon could hamper peer-to-peer communication as it weakens community building due to participants' jeopardised online personal identities.

Follow-up studies determining the constituents of online peer-to-peer communication and community building on SNSs may further our understanding of students' online communicative strategies, as well as of their metacognitive awareness. Integrating an

educational setting into a hyper-social environment as Facebook may cause students to take a step back from the format, as they feel threatened in their privacy and social identity. Further research therefore will have to determine how the communicative and social context of SNSs can be applied to an educational environment to the fullest extent, while keeping the online setting accessible and applicable for both students and the educational institution.

6. Conclusion

The present study first and foremost inquired what communicative purpose the AW Facebook forum fulfils in the educational setting. The study thereupon investigated how social and educational incentives, which are embedded in the online environment, influence participants' language use. The third and last research question focused on whether students are aware of the purpose of the educationally integrated SNS forum, and consequently, of their own peer-to-peer communication.

The data first showed that the online communicative forum used in the present study has an educational as well as a social communicative purpose. The social communicative purpose is inherent to the SNS platform and fosters interpersonal interaction, community building, and the use and re-use of user generated content. However, this peer-to-peer communication forum also has a clear educational communicative purpose, with a task-based approach underlying the educational incentive. As a consequence, the forum also yields educationally relevant communication. In practice, students' peer-to-peer communication applied both communicative purposes. In the course of the first two phases of the project, students produced principally educationally led communication, while in the last two phases of the project students increasingly and primarily produced socially led communication. Due to the cross-over of the social and educational communicative purpose, the language use of the students evolved as well. The social and educational incentives particularly yielded a code-switch in students' online language use, which underlines that both social and educational communication have a valuable presence in the AW Facebook forum. In fact, they were an indissoluble part of the collaborative environment, since if this were not the case, students would not have systematically applied two separate communicative strategies when contributing to the online environment.

The second research question, following from the first one, asked how the social and educational incentives influenced students' language use. A first observation was a significant decrease in contribution length across the four project phases during which the forum's social communicative purpose gradually surpassed the educational. The decrease entails that contributions became less complex and less informative over time. Secondly, as the project progressed, it could be observed that students gradually employed their L1 more. This tendency is significant from the third phase of the project onwards – the phase in which the social communicative purpose of the forum crossed over the educational one. A content analysis, furthermore, indicated that L1 contributions mainly entail social content while L2 contributions mainly entail educational content. This is an academically accurate delineation, given the fact that English is medium-taught during face-to-face instruction (i.e. all academic communication takes place in English). The fact that the educational communicative purpose of the four project phases gradually decreased, explains why the use of students' L1 significantly increased and why the overall language complexity of the contributions significantly decreased. This resulted in a clear distinction between educational and social contributions, based on these particular language features. Thirdly, apart from a decrease in length and an increase in L1, the L2 contributions became more complex and more academic over time, since L2 lexical density and readability gradually increased. The discrepancy between social and educational communication in this perspective explains why the two findings on language complexity, i.e. a decrease in overall contributions, and an increase in L2 contributions, appear contradictory. The social contributions namely influence the

contribution length of the overall contributions: as the number of social contributions gradually increases, the contribution length decreases accordingly. The distinction between L1 contributions, which are mainly social, and L2 contributions, which are mainly educational, also shows that L2 contributions become more complex, which indicates that the distinction between social and educational communication in the AW Facebook forum is one of content as well as one of language complexity. A shift in communicative purpose consequently entails a shift in the students' language use. The distinction between social and educational communication, triggered by social and educational incentives, namely involves a code-switch between languages, and yields a different language complexity level as well as a different degree of informative content between the two communicative purposes. The shift was observed in the three project assignment phases and was confirmed by the findings of the POST-ASS phase. This phase did not contain an educational incentive, which may have triggered the L2 complexity to double in comparison to the complexity level as observed in the first project phase. The breach between social and educational communication due to the presence of two different communicative incentives therefore seems to be attested.

The third question focused on whether students are aware of the educational purpose the SNS forum entails. As students tend to code-switch due to the two different communicative purposes, they appear well aware of the forum's educational purpose, as well as of their own communicative strategies. They employ different communicative strategies to convey different communicative purposes which illustrates their perceived self-efficacy awareness. However, the findings provoke the additional question: To what extent are students aware of their own communicative strategies, and metacognitive strategies, while engaging in online peer-to-peer communication. The content analysis indicates that students are well aware of which information to produce and how to do so (knowledge of cognition), while they also know why they contribute this information (regulation of cognition). The cross-over between the educational and social character of their contributions namely entails a code-switch from the L1 to the L2 and vice versa. This might further indicate that the AW Facebook forum did not lose its educational purpose when the social communicative purpose surpassed the educational; the social purpose even appeared to enhance educational peer-to-peer communication, as is confirmed in the students' attitudes towards peer-to-peer communication. Additionally, the task-based approach which functioned as an educational incentive, was an effective trigger to foster educationally relevant communication. In summary, students are well aware of the educational purpose embedded in the SNS forum and effectively interact in the online collaborative environment by engaging in educationally, as well as in socially relevant peer-to-peer communication. For a vast majority of students, this was an interesting learning experience and one they enjoyed above all.

In conclusion, this study shows that first year English majors actively and knowledgably contribute to their own academic acculturation process as well as to that of their peers by engaging in the educationally integrated AW Facebook forum. This observation illustrates that students are aware of their own communicative and metacognitive strategies in such a setting, and, in addition, confirms that the Facebook forum can be used as an effective collaborative educational environment outside of the foreign language learning classroom.

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8. Appendix

Appendix 1: Take home assignments

THA 1 (ASS1)
Assignment description.

You need resources to prevent your mind from becoming narrower and more routinized in later life. [Taking courses in the humanities] is your chance to get them (Nussbaum 2009).

- Do you agree or not with the above quote?
- Write a 300-word essay. Include one counter-argument.

- Post (at least) one question in the All Write Facebook group concerning your assignment (e.g. Does the following argument make sense? Can I improve the style of this sentence in the following way? Is this the most appropriate word to use in this context? Can I change the grammar of this sentence in this way to make it work?). You can also ask your fellow students for tips and tricks concerning particular aspects academic writing.
- Before you upload your assignment on BB pick the Facebook answer you think was most helpful and write it down below (you are welcome to paste in a screen shot)
- Reply to (at least) one question and try to link it to your own text.
- Upload your assignment on BB by 4 November 12 noon

Question posted in the Facebook-group: .... The most helpful response: .... Dear tutor, could you please pay special attention to the following in my text: ....

THA 2 (ASS2)
Assignment description.

- Below are four debatable statements.

Play Politics **GARRY WILLS** 1. Play to your strengths. Do not make random choices from a bewildering range of subjects for study. So far as you can, choose courses and write papers on topics where you already have (or think you will have) some interest, some knowledge, some enthusiasm. Do not fear that this will narrow you. The deeper you go into one thing, the more it connects you with other things. 2. Read, read, read. Students ask me how to become a writer, and I ask them who is their favorite author. If they have none, they have no love of words.

3. Seek out the most intellectually adventurous of your fellow students. Some are shy around "brains," but you have proximity to young minds as they are developing. That is a great opportunity. Take it.
4. Do not fear political activism. I was once at an event where a student asked Jimmy Carter how he, formerly the guardian of American law, felt years earlier when his freshman daughter was arrested at a protest against apartheid. He answered: "I cannot tell you how proud I was. If you young people cannot express your conscience now, when will you? Later you will have duties, jobs, families that make that harder. You will never be freer than now." Also, among the activists, you are more likely to meet the intellectually adventurous people mentioned in the last item.

Garry Wills, a professor emeritus of history at Northwestern University, has been teaching since 1962.
College Advice, From People Who Have Been There Awhile Educators give some helpful advice to young adults entering school this fall.
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/06/opinion/06collegeadvice.html NYT, Op-Ed Contributor, September 6, 2009

- Pick one or two.
- Do you agree or not?
- Write a 300 word argument or counterargument.

- Pay special attention to topic sentences and linking words.
- Post (at least) one question in the All Write Facebook group concerning your assignment (e.g. Does the following argument make sense? Can I improve the style of this sentence in the following way? Is this the most appropriate word to use in this context? Can I change the grammar of this sentence in this way to make it work?). You can also ask your fellow students for tips and tricks concerning particular aspects academic writing.
- Before you upload your assignment on BB pick the Facebook answer you think was most helpful and write it down below.
- Reply to (at least) one question and try to link it to your own text.
- Upload your assignment on BB by 2 December 12 noon.

Question posted in the Facebook-group:
.....
.....
The most helpful response:
.....
.....
Dear tutor, could you please pay special attention to the following in my text:
.....
.....

THA 3 (ASS3)
Assignment description.

1. ESSAY
Write a 300 word essay agreeing or disagreeing with one or more statements presented in Burns' text below.

Off-Campus Life **By JAMES MacGREGOR BURNS**

Try to read a good newspaper every day — at bedtime or at breakfast or when you take a break in the afternoon. If you are interested in art, literature or music, widen your horizons by poring over the science section. In the mood for spicy scandals? Read the business pages. Want to impress your poli sci prof? Read columnists.

The newspaper will be your path to the world at large. At Williams College, where I was a student in the 1930s, we read the alarming reports in The Times about Germany's brutal onslaught against peaceful nations. In the spring of 1938, we burned Hitler in effigy — and made Page 11 of The Times! In June 1940, as France fell to Nazi troops, hundreds of graduating seniors urged compulsory military training, and provided another Williams story to the paper.

In addition, a great newspaper will teach you how to write: most articles are models of clarity and substance — with no academic jargon! Pay attention to the writer's vocabulary, see how many active verbs are used, file away striking new words for future use. Study how articles are structured — how the first paragraph tells the reader simply and clearly the subject and main points. Take a look at the last paragraph; it will often show you how to conclude an essay with a pithy phrase or a telling quotation.

A great newspaper will help you in the classroom — and it will be your conduit to the real world outside the classroom. Become addicted.

Another way to stay connected with the real world: get to know your teachers outside of class. Chat and engage with them, perhaps on the walk away from class. Ask them not only about the coursework but also about their own intellectual interests and research. Equally important to maintaining that lifeline to the universe beyond college is getting to know the janitors and housekeepers in your dorm, the security staff on the campus, the people who work in the cafeteria. Talk to them, ask them questions and thank them.

James MacGregor Burns, a professor emeritus of government at Williams College and the author, most recently, of "Packing the Court," has been teaching since 1947. ***NYT, Op-Ed Contributor, September 6, 2009.***

- Use the entire All Write scale to proofread your text (to be found on BB).
- Either indent paragraphs or provide a white line between them. Use Arial 10.

2. AWARENESS RAISING

- Post (at least) one question in the All Write Facebook group concerning your assignment (e.g. Does the following argument make sense? Can I improve the style of this sentence in the following way? Is this the most appropriate word to use in this context? Can I change the grammar of this sentence in this way to make it work?). You can also ask your fellow students for tips and tricks concerning particular aspects academic writing.

• Before you upload your assignment on BB pick the Facebook answer you think was most helpful and write it down below.
• Reply to (at least) one question and try to link it to your own text.

Question posted in the Facebook-group: .... The most helpful response: .... Dear tutor, could you please pay special attention to the following in my text: ....

Appendix 2: questionnaires

Pre-questionnaire

Universiteit Antwerpen

Questionnaire: Facebook use

How do Ba1 students use Facebook in their study-environment?

This questionnaire is part of a larger study into the use of Facebook in education. We want to learn about how you use this social network site. Your responses will be treated confidentially and will only be used for our research. *Thank you for your participation! Ward Peeters*

NAME: .....

First name: .....

Studies: .....

Gender: M / F Age: .....

1. **Do you have a Facebook account?**
   o Yes *(continue with questions 2-15)* o No *(if you respond 'no', fill in question 2 and continue with question 17)*

2. **Do you use any other social network site? If yes, which one(s)?**
   o Yes o No
   Comments: .....
   .....

3. **How long have you had your Facebook account?**
   o < 1 year o 1 year o 1-2 years o > 2 years

4. **How often do you check your Facebook account?**
   o more than 10 times a day o once a day o once a week
   o 2-10 times a day o once every two days o once a month

5. **Do you keep your Facebook account open while you are online?**
   o Yes o No

6. **What do you use Facebook for?**
   - o Watching / posting photos
   - o Reading / posting status-updates
   - o Reading news-updates / feed
   - o Sharing news-updates / feed
   - o Chat / private messaging
   - o School related topics
   - o Professional groups (companies, projects, etc.)
   - o Non-professional groups (artists, organisations, etc.)
   - o Calendar/ birthday reminder
   - o Looking at other people's Facebook activities
   - o Other: .....

7. Are you a member of school related solidarity forums on Facebook?

o Yes o No

8. What is your mother tongue (L1)?

.....

9. What is the language setting of your Facebook account?

.....

10. Which language(s) do you use on Facebook? (the most frequent one first)

.....

11. Of how many Facebook groups are you a member?

o < 10 o 10-20 o 21-50 o 51-80 o 81-100 o > 100

12. How many of those are study-related?

o 0 o 1-5 o 6-10 o 11-20 o 21-30 o > 30

13. Do you think Facebook is useful for study-related activities? Why?

o Yes o No

Comments: .....

.....

14. Do you think Facebook could be helpful in second language learning? Why?

o Yes o No

Comments: .....

.....

15. Do you think students should use Facebook as a tool in their education? (solidarity forum, etc.) Why?

o Yes o No

Comments: .....

.....

16. Do you think educational institutions should use Facebook as a tool in their curriculum? Why?

o Yes o No

Comments: .....

.....

In case you don't have a Facebook account, continue here:

17. Would you create a Facebook account if it has a positive impact on your study activity?

o Yes o No

18. What is your mother tongue (L1)?

.....

19. Do you think social network sites could be useful for study-related activities? Why?

o Yes o No

Comments: .....

.....

20. Do you think social network sites could be helpful in second language learning? Why?

o Yes o No

Comments: .....

.....

21. Do you think students should use social network sites as a tool in their education? (solidarity forum, etc.) Why?

o Yes o No

Comments: .....

.....

22. Do you think educational institutions should use social network sites as a tool in their curriculum? Why?

o Yes o No

Comments: .....

.....

Thanks!

Post-questionnaire

Universiteit Antwerpen

Questionnaire:

How do Ba1 students use Facebook in their study-environment?

This second questionnaire is part of a larger study into the use of Facebook in educational settings. We want to learn more about how you used this social network site in the past few months as part of the All Write take home assignments. Your responses will be treated confidentially and will only be used for our research.

Thank you for your participation! Ward Peeters

NAME: .....

First name: .....

Studies (Language Combination): .....

Gender: M / F Age: .....

1. **Do you have a Facebook account?**
   o Yes o No

2. **Are you a member of the All Write Solidarity Forum on Facebook?**
   o Yes *(please complete questions 3-22)* o No *(please complete questions 23-26)*

What is your opinion about the following statements? Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your personal opinion.

3. **The discussions on the Facebook Forum helped me to better understand what writing in an academic context is about.**
   o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

4. **I became more skilled in academic writing due to my active participation on the Facebook Forum.**
   o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

   Please explain further: .....
   .....

5. **My peers helped me to improve the content of my take home assignments (topic, argumentation, etc.) through the discussions on the Facebook Forum.**
   o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

6. **My peers helped me to improve the formulation of my take home assignments (grammar, spelling, etc.) through the discussions on the Facebook Forum.**
   o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

7. **My peers helped me to improve the structure of my take home assignments (placing of thesis statement, different building blocks, etc.) through the discussions on the Facebook Forum.**
   o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

8. **I liked being part of the Facebook Forum.**
   o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

9. **I gained confidence in discussing language topics due to my active participation on the Facebook Forum.**
   o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

10. **I gained confidence in writing in an academic context due to my active participation on the Facebook Forum.**
    o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

11. **I felt comfortable discussing my take home assignments on the Facebook Forum.**
    o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

    Why do you think this was the case?: .....
    .....

12. **I felt comfortable writing my take home assignments after discussing my questions on the Facebook Forum.**
    o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

    Why do you think this was the case?: .....
    .....

13. **I read other people's posts and discussions on the Facebook Forum to learn more about academic writing.**
    o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

14. **I believe that the Facebook Forum was used for educational purposes.**
    o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

    Comments: .....
    .....

15. **I believe that the Facebook Forum was used more for social purposes than for educational purposes.**
    o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

    Comments: .....
    .....

16. **I provided extra support for my peers at least once on the Facebook Forum (e.g. I did more than reply to their assignment questions).**
    o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

    Comments: .....
    .....

17. **I believe it is appropriate for a lecturer/tutor to join a Facebook forum like this.**
    o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

    Why?: .....
    .....

18. **The presence of a lecturer/tutor on the Facebook Forum would have influenced my participation on the Facebook Forum.**
    o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

    Please explain further: .....
    .....

19. I felt monitored by a member of the educational institution on the Facebook Forum.

o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

Please explain further: .....

.....

20. I believe a Facebook forum could be useful in second language learning.

o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

Why?: .....

.....

21. Students should use Facebook as a tool in their education.

o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

Why?: .....

.....

22. Educational institutions should support resources on Facebook to stimulate peer-to-peer learning.

o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

Why?: .....

.....

Thank you for your time and participation!

In case you don't have a Facebook account or did not participate in the All Write Solidarity Forum, continue here:

23. Were there any reasons you did not join the All Write Solidarity Forum on Facebook?

.....

.....

24. How did you communicate with your peers about your take home assignments?

.....

.....

What is your opinion about the following statements? Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your personal opinion.

25. Students should use Facebook as a tool in their education.

o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

Why?: .....

.....

26. Educational institutions should support resources on Facebook to stimulate peer-to-peer learning.

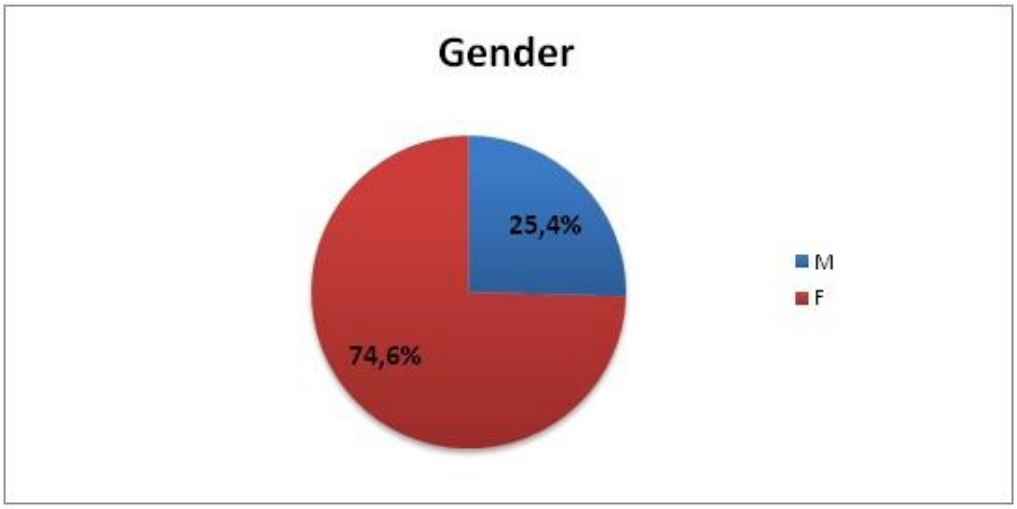
o Strongly agree o Agree o I don't know o Disagree o Strongly disagree

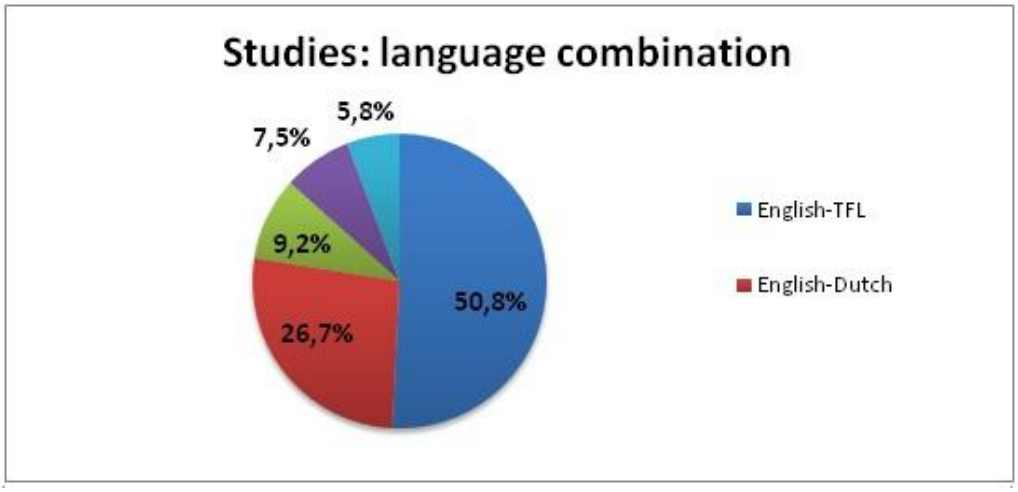
Why?: .....

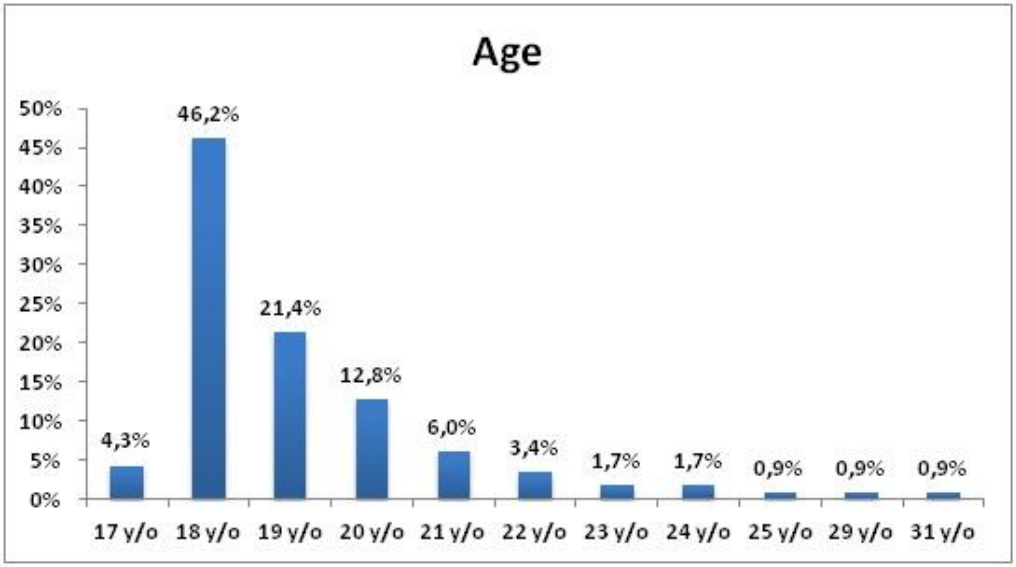
.....

Thank you for your time and participation!

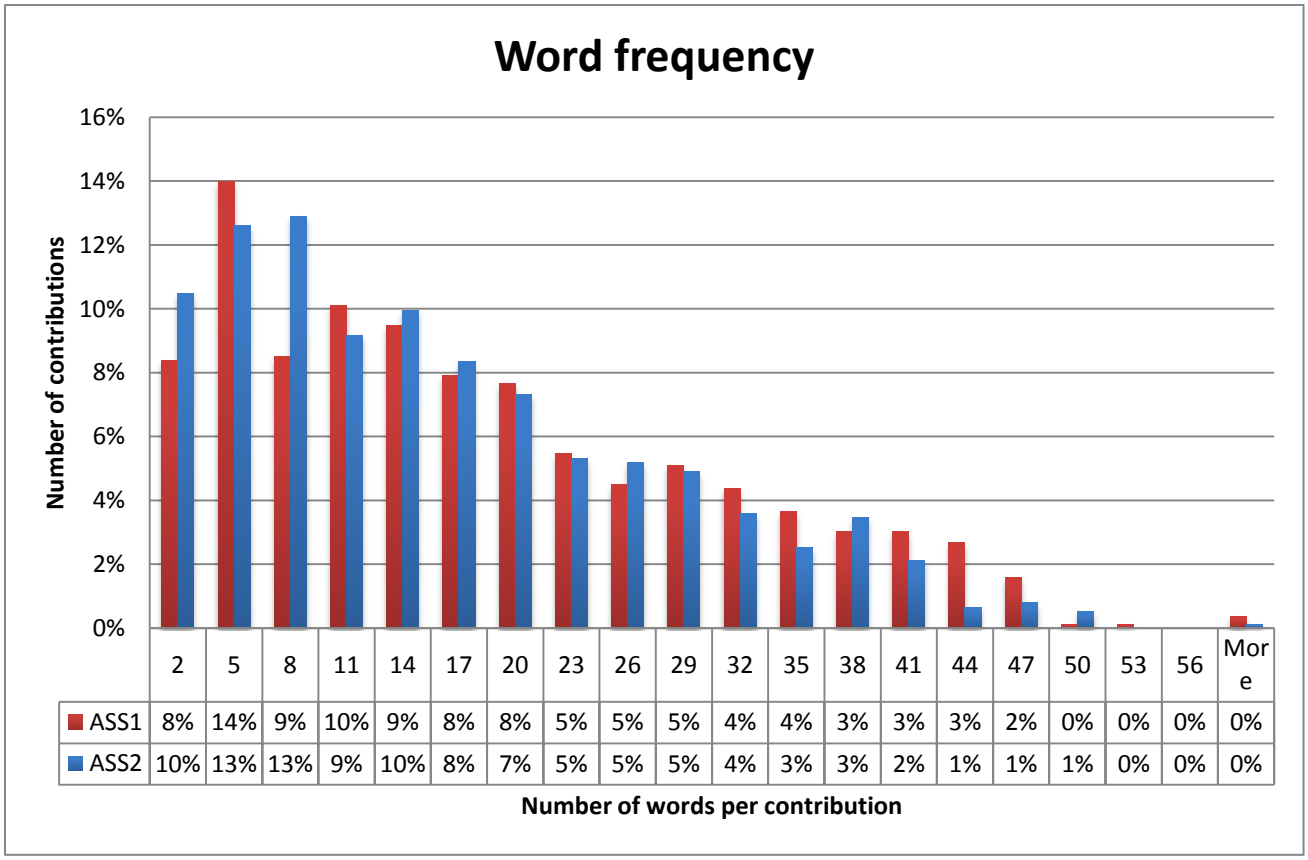
Appendix 3: Participants





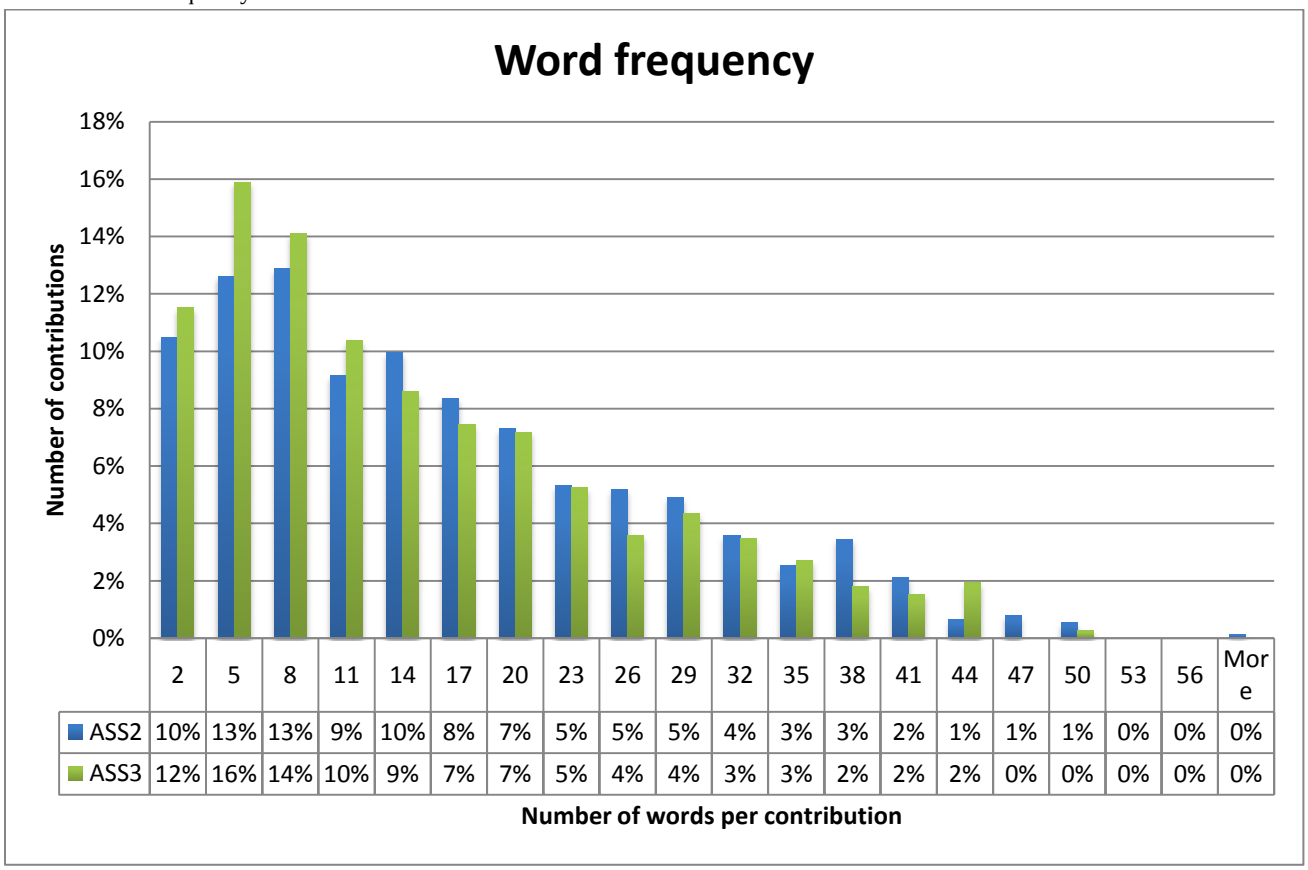


Appendix 4



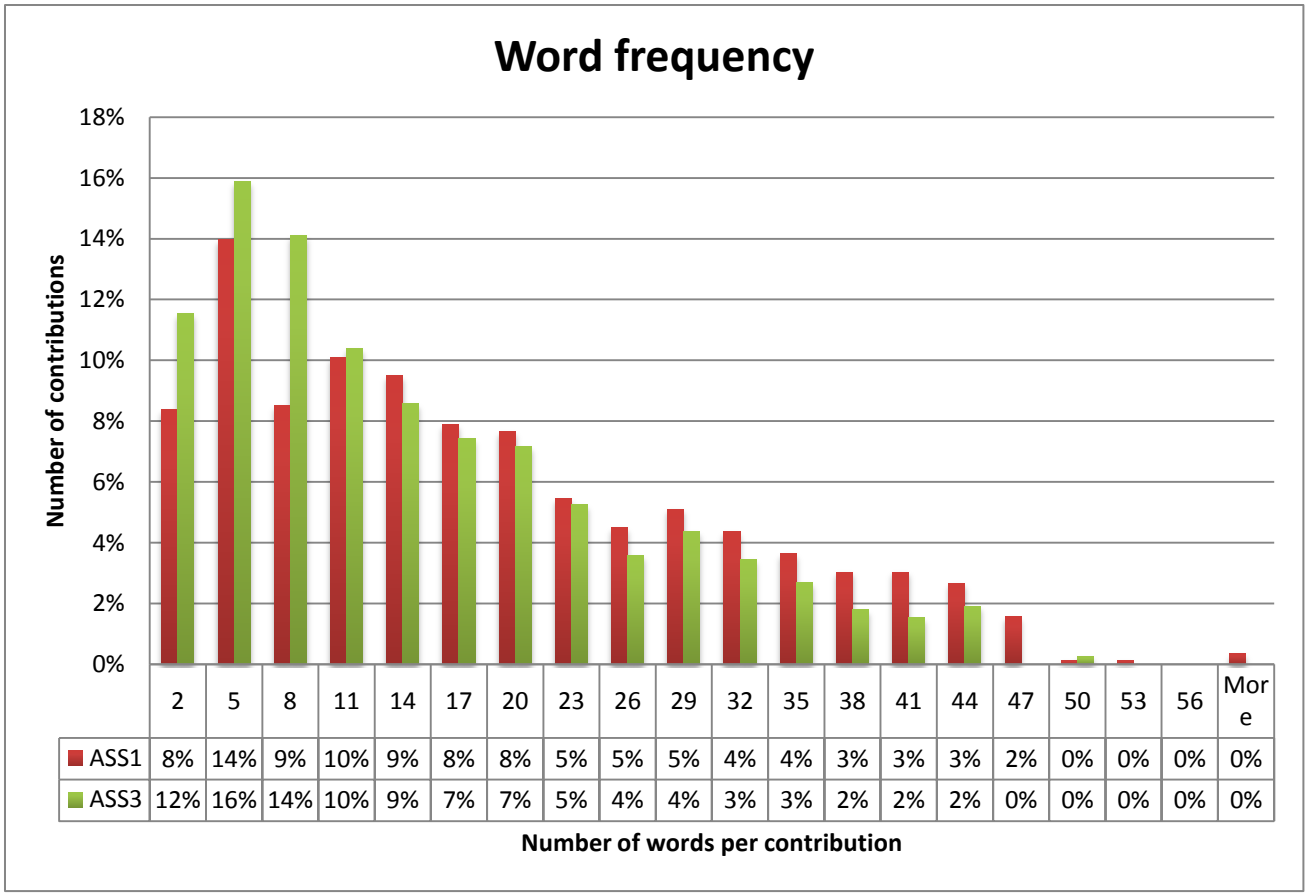
	2	5	8	11	14	17	20	23	26	29	32	35	38	41	44	47	50	53	56	More
ASS1	8%	14%	9%	10%	9%	8%	8%	5%	5%	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
ASS2	10%	13%	13%	9%	10%	8%	7%	5%	5%	5%	4%	3%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%

Table 1: Word frequency ASS1 and ASS2



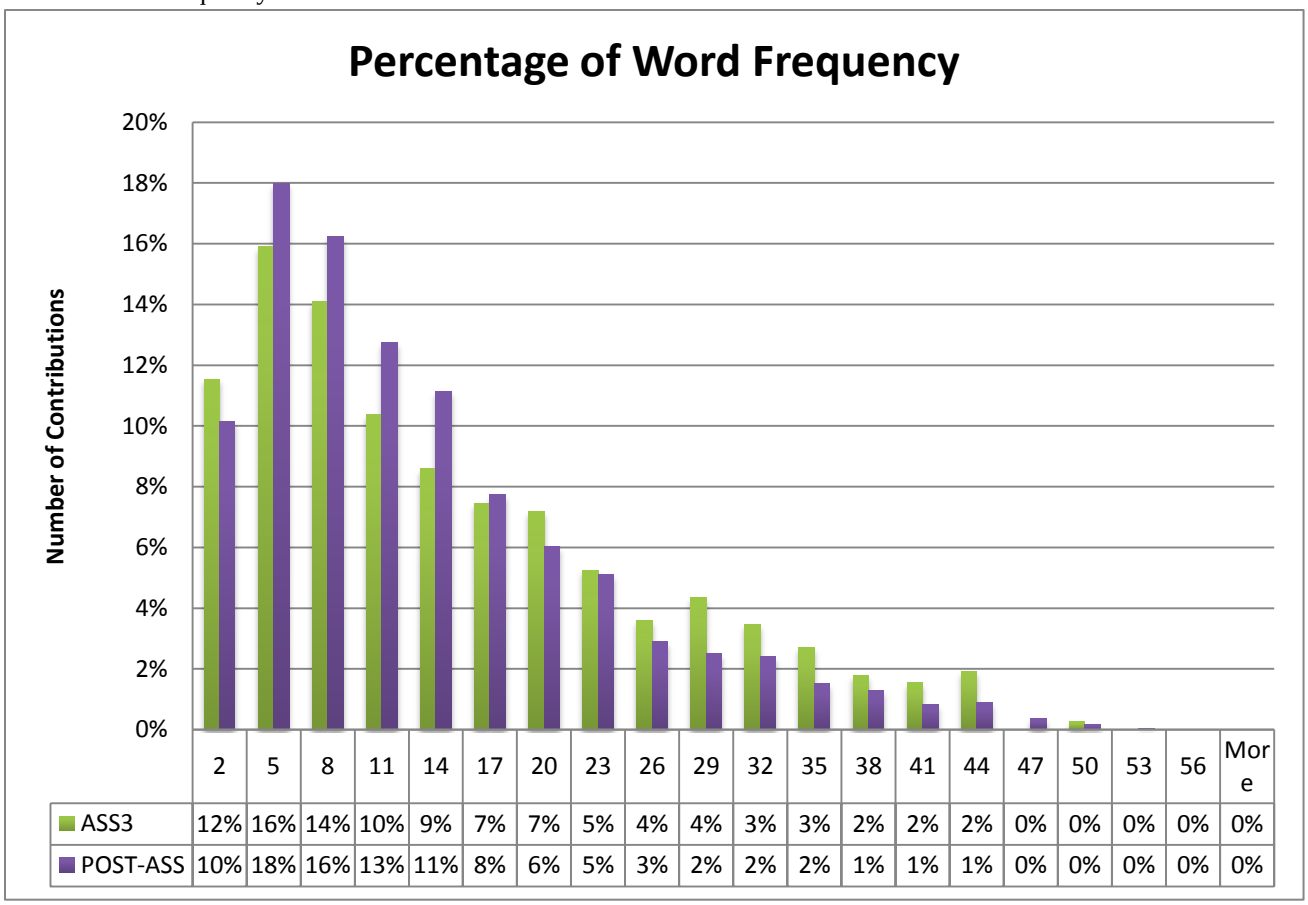
	2	5	8	11	14	17	20	23	26	29	32	35	38	41	44	47	50	53	56	More
ASS2	10%	13%	13%	9%	10%	8%	7%	5%	5%	5%	4%	3%	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
ASS3	12%	16%	14%	10%	9%	7%	7%	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 2: Word frequency ASS2 and ASS3



	2	5	8	11	14	17	20	23	26	29	32	35	38	41	44	47	50	53	56	More
ASS1	8%	14%	9%	10%	9%	8%	8%	5%	5%	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
ASS3	12%	16%	14%	10%	9%	7%	7%	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 3: Word frequency ASS1 and ASS3



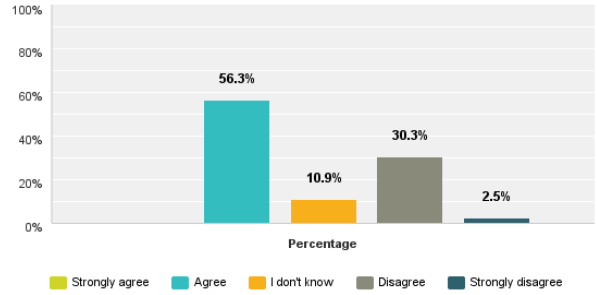
	2	5	8	11	14	17	20	23	26	29	32	35	38	41	44	47	50	53	56	More
ASS3	12%	16%	14%	10%	9%	7%	7%	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
POST-ASS	10%	18%	16%	13%	11%	8%	6%	5%	3%	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 4: Word frequency ASS3 and POST-ASS

Appendix 5: Post-questionnaire

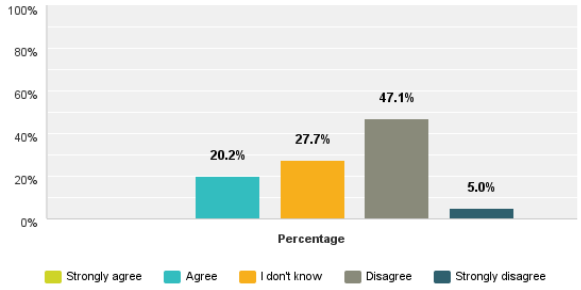
Q6 The discussions on the Facebook Forum helped me to better understand what writing in an academic context is about.

Answered: 119 Skipped: 0



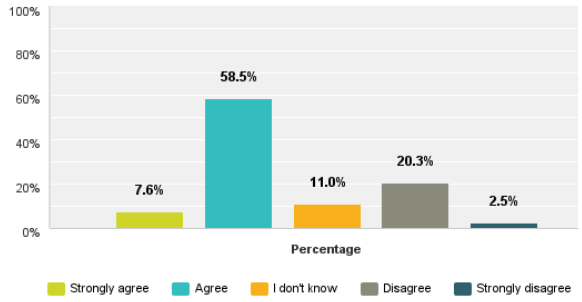
Q7 I became more skilled in academic writing due to my active participation on the Facebook Forum.

Answered: 119 Skipped: 0



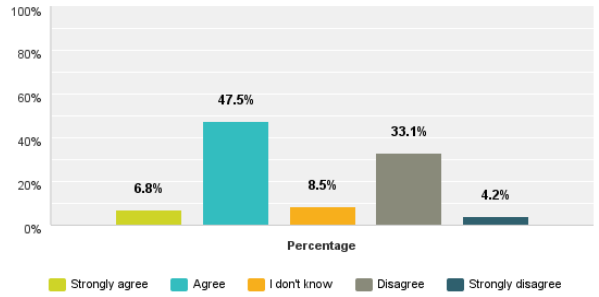
Q8 My peers helped me to improve the content of my take home assignments (topic, argumentation, etc.) through the discussions on the Facebook Forum.

Answered: 118 Skipped: 1



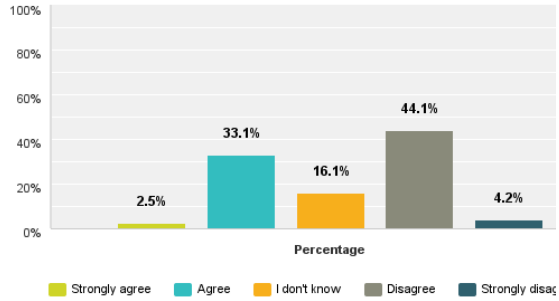
Q9 My peers helped me to improve the formulation of my take home assignments (grammar, spelling, etc.) through the discussions on the Facebook Forum.

Answered: 118 Skipped: 1



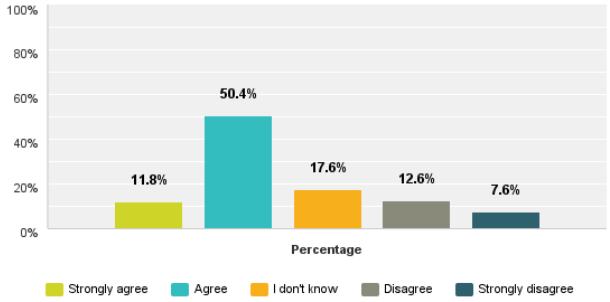
Q10 My peers helped me to improve the structure of my take home assignments (placing of thesis statement, different building blocks, etc.) through the discussions on the Facebook Forum.

Answered: 118 Skipped: 1



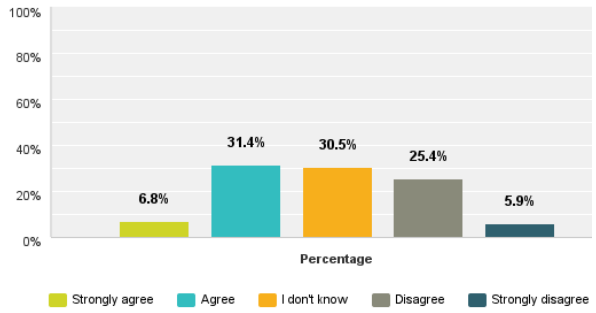
Q11 I liked being part of the Facebook Forum.

Answered: 119 Skipped: 0



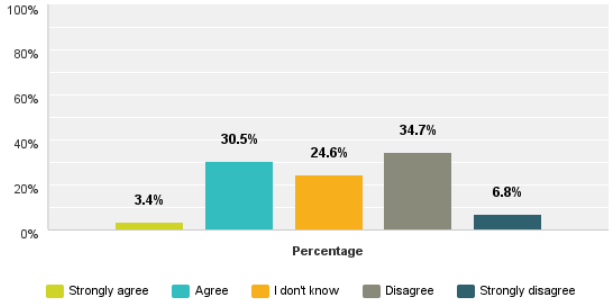
Q12 I gained confidence in discussing language topics due to my active participation on the Facebook Forum.

Answered: 118 Skipped: 1



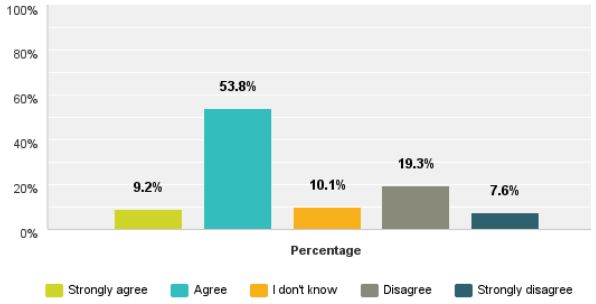
Q13 I gained confidence in writing in an academic context due to my active participation on the Facebook Forum.

Answered: 118 Skipped: 1



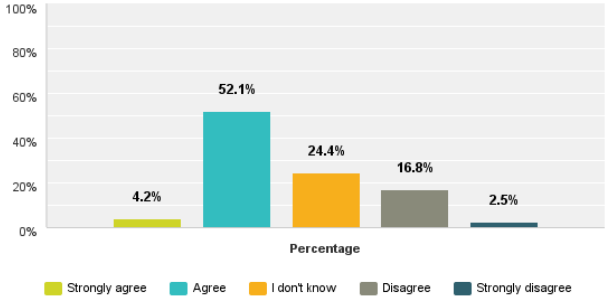
Q14 I felt comfortable discussing my take home assignments on the Facebook Forum.

Answered: 119 Skipped: 0



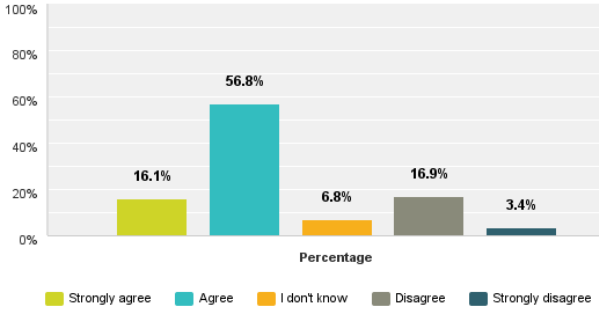
Q15 I felt comfortable writing my take home assignments after discussing my questions on the Facebook Forum.

Answered: 119 Skipped: 0



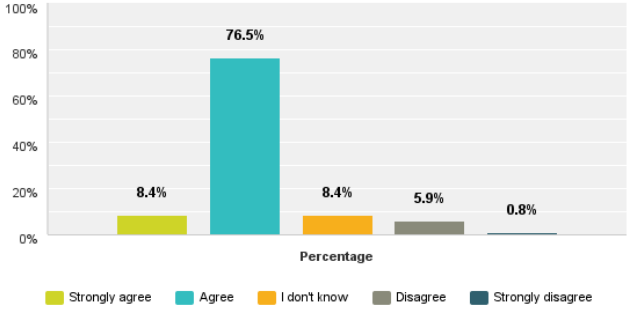
Q16 I read other people's posts and discussions on the Facebook Forum to learn more about academic writing.

Answered: 118 Skipped: 1



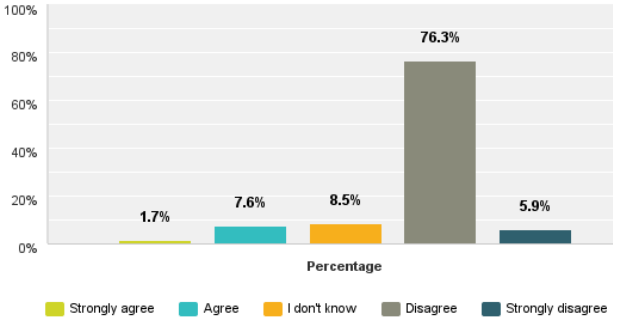
Q17 I believe that the Facebook Forum was used for educational purposes.

Answered: 119 Skipped: 0



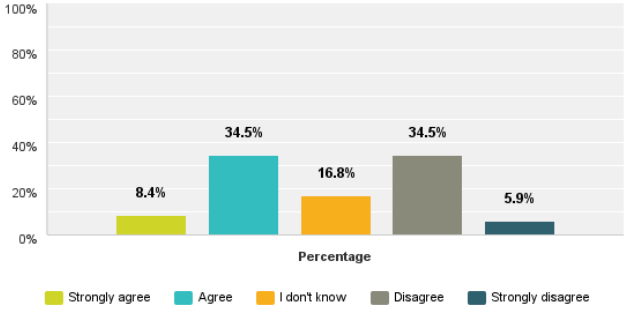
Q18 I believe that the Facebook Forum was used more for social purposes than for educational purposes.

Answered: 118 Skipped: 1



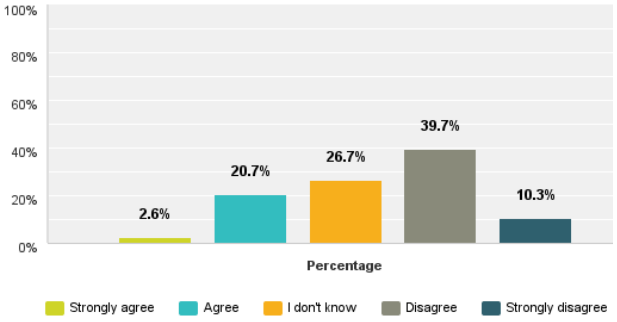
Q19 I provided extra support for my peers at least once on the Facebook Forum (e.g. I did more than reply to their assignment questions).

Answered: 119 Skipped: 0



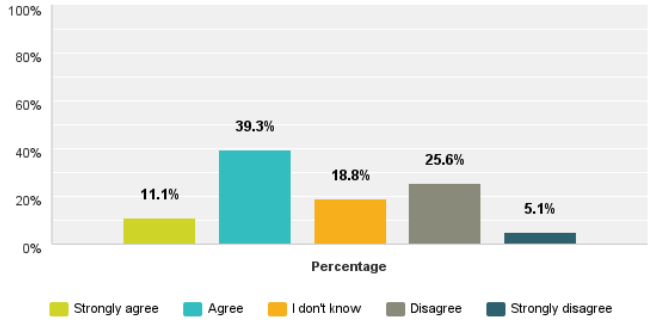
Q20 I believe it is appropriate for a lecturer/tutor to join a Facebook forum like this.

Answered: 116 Skipped: 3



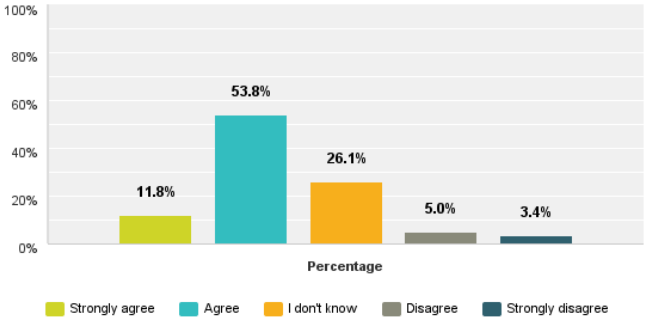
Q21 The presence of a lecturer/tutor on the Facebook Forum would have influenced my participation on the Facebook Forum.

Answered: 117 Skipped: 2



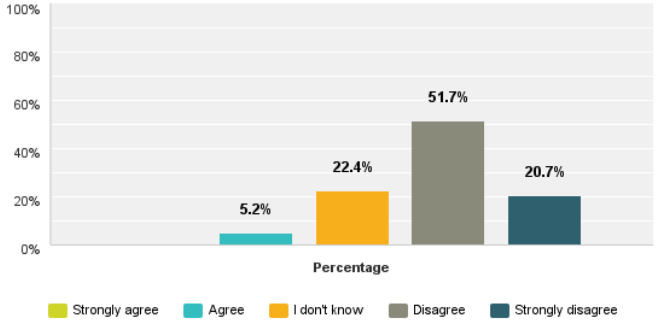
Q23 I believe a Facebook forum could be useful in second language learning.

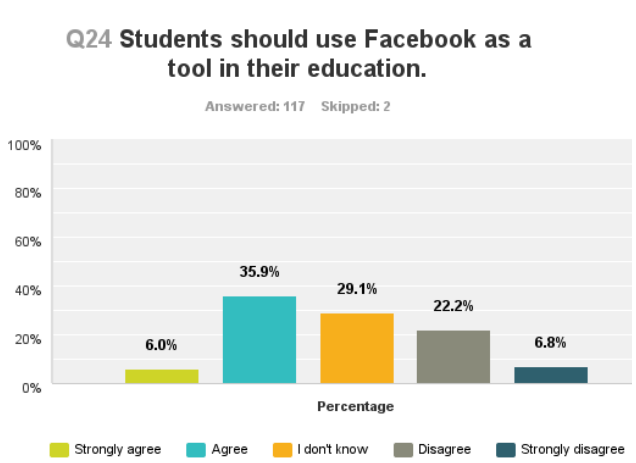
Answered: 119 Skipped: 0

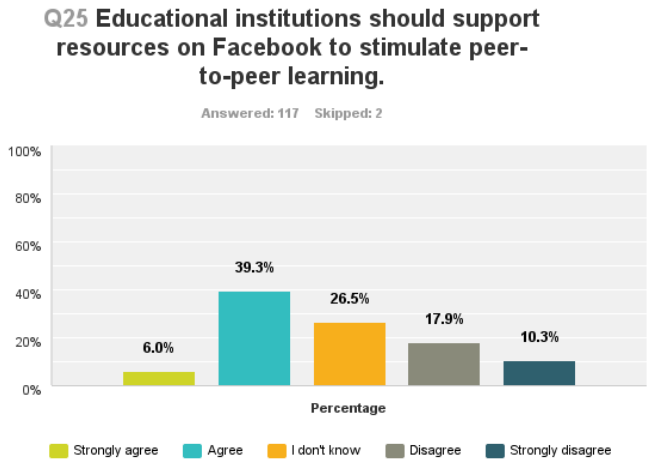


Q22 I felt monitored by a member of the educational institution on the Facebook Forum.

Answered: 116 Skipped: 3







Appendix 6

Conversation 1: Student poll ASS3