

Article

Language in the Wild—Living the Carnival in Social Media

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External Editor: Martin J. Bull

Received: 3 June 2014; in revised form: 29 September 2014 / Accepted: 30 October 2014 / Published: 12 November 2014

Abstract: This study presents results from an intervention case study at upper secondary level, in which *Blogger* was introduced during English class. The overarching interest was to explore the students' social performances and their interplay with students' uses of language across multiple forms of literate activities in blogging. The study draws on a sociocultural perspective, taking a particular interest in language as a meditational tool for communication and interaction in the students' own digital vernacular practices. Goffman's dramaturgical approach including the concepts of performance and role distance in front and back regions together with Bakhtin's notion of carnival were invoked as analytical tools for the analysis of video material as well as ethnographic scraping of online content in the blog. It was found that the students presented a witty, humorous image of themselves, while playing around with language as well as bringing in manipulated media for mockery and self-irony. Analytically speaking the students were living the carnival by utilizing a norm-breaking language—a language in the wild. Though this in-depth study presents a limited number of students' blogging, the findings contribute to an increased understanding of the in situ creation of a blogger text providing a basis for discussing the uses of language in social media and what this implies for learning languages and for teaching practices.

Keywords: language use; social media; Bakhtin; carnival; Goffman; performance; blogging; interaction analysis; role distance

1. Introduction

After decades of research on the roles of information technology and its relations to the learning sciences, expectations appear to remain concerning more or less seamless use to address and solve some educational dilemmas. These kinds of expectations comprise exaggerated promises of how information technology will revolutionize schooling and transform the very *nature of learning*. However, such assumptions have also been criticized for being seductive and biased [1]. In retrospect, new technologies have been investigated with high expectations of positive development of the more general ways of framing institutionally organized education, which is increasingly discussed as in need of pedagogical change.

Today's social media imply almost unlimited possibilities of participating and engaging as audience, but also by going public yourself on the Internet. Social media as part of everyday life has been explored as sites in which young people, among other activities, engage in identity work that is performing online the way you want others to look at you [2]. As a research area, this has led to increasing numbers of studies investigating what these changed conditions for engagement afford, and what constraints can be discussed when social media is moving into other areas from the original foundation of people's engagement stemming from so called *self-directed practices* [3], to interests based on institutional educational practices, with their specific relations to a content, taught and learned [4].

Social media sites have been examined as spaces for the ongoing development of young people's individual or collective identities, which are continuously negotiated for a potential, or already known public, or even for multiple publics [5]. One issue of specific concern in social media, is that the conditions for engaging have changed not only the context but also the connection to an audience, whether real, assumed or both. What [6] has been conceptualized as *social performance*, that is acting social, although it was discussed in relation to earlier media such as TV, can still be useful to apply. Activities such as updating your status and profile can be seen as part of your social performance, how you want others to see you, in other words how you frame the situation as a kind of performance. Research [7,8] displays similar results regarding the development of social identity as closely interlinked with intentions of how you present yourself online, as part of management impression. Working on your profile and updating your status is argued to be a kind of performance, and that by experimenting with images, you are *writing yourself into being* [5], Boyd referring to Sundén [9,10] draws parallels with gossiping and chatting, but in another context as part of displaying who you are, or who you want to be seen as.

Conceptualizing learning across boundaries, in various social practices for various reasons of participating and engaging, is argued to have the potential of leading to other ways of learning [11]. Boundaries are here appreciated as potential spaces for learning, rather than as barriers to learning [11]. When students take the space as theirs it opens up for possibilities of initiating *extended spaces*, enabling meaningful and engaging interactions beyond regular school tasks [12]. A similar argument

is put forward by Kumpulainen and Mikkola [13], who maintain that students' boundary-crossing between discourses in everyday life of which schooling is part, can lead to hybrid spaces. Web 2.0 can be used as an overarching term that includes social media. What is further argued to characterize social media, is that they present opportunities for collaboration, for sharing and as spaces open for everyday social talk in which humour and irony are also part of this parcel [2,14]. This illustrates a kind of participation without instructional or geographical limiting frames, people can join and engage with others as they like in this *animated chaos* [5].

The use of language in bridging activities in education, has been explored with an interest in what is conceptualized as students' *digital vernacular*, based on notions of their *living language use* and *language in the wild* that is investigating uses of language when students are in control [15–17]. In such cases the uses of language have been studied across multiple forms of literate activities. In this approach language use is investigated as inseparable into either productive or receptive linguistic skills, in other words characteristics of spoken language is interconnected with written language without restricting boundaries. Multiple forms of literate activities in students' digital vernacular can be exemplified by their uses of emoticons, smileys, acronyms such as LoL (laughing out loud), chatting intertwined with updates of profiles and status, the use of various Web resources, such as Wikipedia and the sharing of websites, music videos, photos, Youtube *etc.* This use of multiple forms of literate activities does not adhere to more traditional literacy boundaries set by education. Consequently, this implies investigating uses of language beyond educational settings. These linguistic media practices, also conceptualized as *cultures-of-use* [18], are argued to take place in particular communicative practices, which in turn are dependent on and interact with the specific context in which communication is taking place. Diverse linguistic activities are used pragmatically to display the participants as quick, humorous and as multilingual [18].

Aspects of language use in social media are, however, when seen from a more traditional perspective, more seldom recognized as belonging to linguistic competences [16]. As these communicative ways differ considerably from communication in a printed format, it is less meaningful to make comparisons. Digitally mediated communication is distinguished by totally different conditions like for example the re-mix and manipulation of images and texts created by others, which indicates considerable differences. This way of making use of language parallels [19] with the concept of carnival where the informal and intimate language of the marketplace enabled a free approach to the official intercourse and a play with the language in a way that was not possible in other situations. Thus, the concept of carnival will be useful as an analytical lens for studying the use of vernacular speech interactions in social media to put focus on the in situ creation of social media texts.

Texts constructed in social media contexts, risk, however, being perceived as characterized by the use of simple linguistic constructions at a very basic level [20]. Therefore, more research is needed on language in the wild to raise an awareness regarding the complex interrelationships between mediating technologies and how they are used in everyday life. As a consequence of the arguments and concerns presented in the above, investigating social media is not a trivial activity. On the contrary, there are several issues that can be argued as interconnected, and therefore, in need of further research. The research study presented here explores upper secondary students' interaction, in particular one pair of students, during a blogging activity in social media in a schooling context. The activity as such was introduced during English class, and was also a start of an international collaboration with a group of

Thai students. The case presented here was part of the three-year-long research project *Linguascapes*, 2012–2014, which included international collaboration as one aspect. The overarching aim of the research project was to explore whether the gap between young people's learning in social media practices and language learning practices in school can be bridged. For the case presented in this paper language learning as a subject and international collaboration were part of the context in which the data were produced. The specific aim here, however, is to explore, analyse and present students' uses of language in social media and contribute to the ongoing discussion what these imply for learning languages and for teaching practices. The blogging was explicitly open for the students to decide what to post and it was also made explicit that the language would neither be assessed nor graded.

The reasons for statements about no assessment and grading was based on previous literature review [12] which pointed to predominant research that applied social media for language learning, but with teaching practices including quantification of the students communication such as requirements of numbers of postings, length of postings as well as grading the use of language. Thus, the suggested activity during class was voluntary and was meant to serve as a trigger for those who needed this to start blogging. In other words, the study aimed at encouraging student agency, and at exploring the uses of language when acting and performing in social media. For analysing how the students took on different roles to adjust to the activity and perform in line with how they wished to be perceived by others, Goffman's [21] dramaturgical approach was used.

Analytically we also drew on Bakhtin's concepts of *carnival* and living the carnival to investigate students' ways of dealing with the blogging activity, both in interaction, communication and in the posting itself as the outcome of a collaborative activity.

2. Aim of the Study and Research Questions

The underpinning of this study is a sociocultural perspective on learning, which implies that language is understood as a mediational tool for communication and interaction, and practices are perceived as contextual and situated, thereby also including tools used in the interactions [22,23]. The overarching research interest is in exploring the students' uses of language interaction during a blogging activity in social media as part of schooling.

The following research questions have guided the study:

- (1) How do the students' interactions in social media and in the classroom interplay with how they implicitly or explicitly define the activity while performing it?
- (2) How do the students' uses of language connect across multiple forms of literate activities in their blogging performance and how are these activities linked to the classroom/in situ context?
- (3) How do the students perform in line with the image they want to present to others in the blogging activity and how does that relate to the languages used?

3. Educational Rationales for Engaging in Social Media

The research interest in social media has led to an increasing number of studies investigating potential affordances as well as tensions that might arise from the implementing of social media technologies into an institutionally framed context such as schooling. There are several research

studies in higher education on language learning and language teaching situated in an institutional framing, in which social media were introduced, but the activities as such were grounded in language as a subject to be taught and learned [24–26]. Quite contrary to this approach, our aim was to explore the conditions for using social media for language learning, as language in the wild, similar to students' own use of language and open up for exploring students' agency when given space. This shift in perspective implies that the use of language is our main focus, even though the context of schooling cannot be overlooked when exploring and discussing implications for language learning and language teaching. Findings from previous research studies below are presented in relation to the research aim of the case presented in this paper, indicating that our particular interests have been to focus on students' interaction, communication, collaboration and the consequences of making use of social media.

In a previous action research study, a blog was introduced for language learning in higher education with the basic assumption that a blog could act as an open window to culture and authenticity. The students, however, were more interested in getting to know each other as persons, rather than as representatives for a culture [25]. A similar finding was discussed by Yang [26], in a quantitative study aimed at multilateral collaboration. The result from this study implied that *shared spaces* in a class blog with students from Japan and Thailand, were significantly linked to the sharing of similar personal experiences for the students to take initiatives for interaction and communication. Lack of a common ground thus resulted in lacking communication on the blog.

The study of a larger cohort of 2611 British students, aged 13–15, included 22 schools in a survey and at a later stage in the research project, 53 focus groups were interviewed adopting grounded theory for the analyses [27]. The overarching interest was to investigate the consequences of making use of technology between practices, that is, to explore the potential *fit* between Web 2.0 and schooling. The study was based on the assumption that “any set of communicative and intellectual practices will always be shaped by the socio-cultural context within which those practices are enacted” ([27], p. 66). Several student accounts illustrated how students' interest in and awareness of publishing for an audience became constrained in schooling. Moreover, the Web 2.0 context opened up for a more *playful activity* and as a *meandering* activity, while schooling structured for more project-based activities. Crook also points to collaboration in Web 2.0 and “knowledge as socially distributed but also as socially *constructed*” ([27], p. 71), thereby stressing the need to consider the given conditions in different practices.

However, when the conditions for using social media are implemented with more or less open questions to study uses of language when students are in control, a somewhat different picture emerges. With a focus on language and literacy, Davies [28] investigated 25 regular *Facebook* groups of users, aged 16–18, in the UK. The aim was to explore *Facebook* as a text-making site holding potential space for new literacy practices. The teenagers' interactions were analysed by using Goffman's dramaturgical approach to study new ways of facework, and also what distinguished managing friendship in *Facebook*. The case was built on already existing groups of friends. The analysis took a multidisciplinary approach, and drew on discourse analysis and text making as narrative. The researcher, however, did not become a member in any of the *Facebook* groups in the study. Each teenager selected and took two screen shots, connected to postings and comments, which served as data that were discussed during the interview. It was recurrently found that the teenagers used various degrees of proximity in their communication, including and excluding for different reasons.

Emanating from Goffman's dramaturgical approach, Davies [28] used the concept of *performance across spaces* to analyse the students' language in the wild, that is interactions that were distinguished by moving in and out between writing and speaking, by co-constructing texts and sometimes by translating their conversations from oral to written to enable a continuous conversation. Of particular interest was one student who was planning to stage a story mediated by *Facebook*. In this drama she wanted to have her friends to participate as co-producers and co-performers by uploading photos, and the story would bridge online as well as offline spaces. Davies [28] suggests that the social literacy practices the teenagers exemplify, are vernacular practices in which they perform a number of diverse social acts.

Another study with a research interest in students' use of digital vernacular when students are in control is a British study based on a large cohort of university students. The results from this study displayed another characteristic in the students' language in the wild in *Facebook*, that is, *banter*, which was frequently found. Bantering was distinguished by sarcasms, humour and irony, and was argued to reflect the students' ongoing communication across spaces. Besides this, students were using *Facebook* for *talk as usual*, but it was just going on in a different space [29].

In addition to setting up research studies on students' textual productions in social media to enable insights into their living language, Goodings [30] argues that, so far, little attention has been paid to visual dimensions when exploring social media. Even more stressed is the lack of research scrutinizing how the textual and visual are interrelated. Based on the analyses of a hundred open access profiles in *MySpace*, he found that notions of self, as *dramaturgical* selves, a concept that will be elaborated on below, became more complicated since a presentation in social media was also connected to the actual social physical context, for example when being somewhere with friends.

4. Analytical Perspective

Performance in Line with a Microsociological and Interactional Perspective

Based on Erwin Goffman's [21] dramaturgical approach on interpersonal social interaction, the focus in this study is on how the students' interactions interplay with how they implicitly or explicitly want to present themselves. This can be understood as part of a larger process, by which the social self is regarded as a result of the interaction and as part of how the activity is defined and accordingly framed [7]. The participants in an activity do not create the definition but rather act in accordance with how they understand the activity and how they want to be perceived by the other participants. Thus, social rituals and strategic activities are part of the performance and included in the image we want others to see. In social situations in Web 2.0 environments this is achieved by the use of various linguistic resources such as responses, keywords etc. but also for example by posting Web links and images [5,31]. Consequently, blog posts and comments are seen as part of a performance, which in terms of Goffman's [21] concepts can be understood as if we display different roles and different ways of presenting ourselves.

5. Performance—Front Regions and Back Regions

The specific activity, which is embedded in a certain context is, accordingly, crucial for our performance and Goffman maintains that we mainly define our performance in relation to two kinds of broad contexts: front regions and back regions ([21], pp. 107, 112). Front regions are seen as contextually characterized as public where the performance could be compared to an act, taking place before an audience, as if standing on a stage. In back regions, we can act differently since we are fronting persons that we know very well. Based on his field studies in the Shetland Isles where these concepts were developed, Goffman gives as a clear example of how a waiter could be considered to be in the front region when he is in the restaurant and in the back region when he is in the kitchen ([21], p. 116).

When we perform in what we perceive as front regions, we act in line with the prevailing social norms (courtesy norms, decency standards, *etc.*) while we in back regions may act in ways that we deliberately avoid in front regions. The difference between front and back regions implies making a distinction between different audiences, that is the individual's monitoring of her/his presentation of self in what is made possible for the audience to see and which audience that will be able to see what [31]. This means that the very same person may perform and present him or herself differently depending on the context. Furthermore individuals have the ability to distance themselves from a specific role by conducting *role distance* [32]. The concept role distance explains the way in which people distance themselves from the duties and requirements of roles by making use of attitudes and behaviours and through this displays a kind of resistance against the accepted definition of the situation. A common way to show role distance is through irony, humour and laughter, which in social media interactions are achieved by, for example, the use of emoticons. Even if Goffman's perspective on interaction was not developed in relation to online communication, we argue that the concepts within frame analysis function well for exploring social media interaction and the relationship between audiences and producers in such spaces (for a further discussion regarding this argument, see, e.g., [6,33,34]).

6. Living the Carnival in Social Media Vernacular

As maintained earlier, the language that is commonly used in social media contexts is often characterized by young people's digital vernacular, a written language that in many respects resembles talk but freed from many written conventions: a language in the wild [15–17]. This kind of language can be linked to Bakhtin's [19] concept *carnival* that derives from notions of the medieval carnival as a place in which people are not distinguished as either performers or viewers, but rather as active participants. In the events of carnivals, rules, inhibitions and regulations that determine the course of everyday life, are temporarily suspended and the use of language for interaction is playful, imaginative and filled with mockery "the familiar language of the marketplace became a reservoir in which speech patterns excluded from official intercourse could freely accumulate" ([19], p. 17). In relation to our study, the task is thus re-created through the students' dialogue and use of other linguistic resources where we argue that the concept of carnival is useful for understanding the activity of producing social media texts in the context where they are created (*cf.* [5,35]).

7. The Case—The Context

Intervention, Interaction Analysis and Ethnographic Data

The study presented here is part of a research project, funded by the Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg Foundation, aiming at exploring students' use of English in social media. The study was designed as an intervention into existing practices, involving a class in Thailand and one in Sweden, both at upper secondary level. *Blogger* was presented during a class in Sweden and after the introductory activities, the blog was open for the students' own engagement. *Blogger*, now linked to Google, affords similar functions as most social media sites: postings, uploading images, linking to Websites, and movies and audio. Like in *Facebook*, you can comment on other postings as well as value a posting by ticking a box to state your view.

The case study is partly based on ethnographic data involving the scraping of online content such as screen shots from the blog to assemble postings, images, comments and video links so that they can be scrutinized in analysable forms [36]. However, to enable an in-depth analysis of how students frame the activity, and the resources that are made use of, the students' interactions, communication and blogging were also captured with video. The study presented here is based on five hours' video material captured during an English class when the blog was introduced to the Swedish students. Five cameras on tripods were placed behind the students in the computer lab of the school, which was where the first blogging activity took place. The four pairs, and one group of three students volunteered to participate in the study. The video material has been transcribed and analysed using interaction analysis [37]. This implies a focus on the students' communication, how they negotiate what to post, how their postings are formulated, what resources are brought into their interaction, and what finally becomes their posting. Deriving from ethnography, participatory observations in particular, sociolinguistics, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis (e.g., [38,39]) and other traditions, which also include non-verbal resources in joint action, the aims of interaction analysis are to identify how the participants interact and make use of various resources in the complex social contexts in which they act. Interaction analysis is also consistent with Goffman's theoretical basis in which interaction is seen as a job that participants, in an activity, perform to achieve something, and the assumption that the analysis should focus on is how the participants create meaning in this activity. In our analytical work we have alternated between transcribed lines in the students' interactions and between zooming in on specifically selected video sequences and investigated the link with the posting in *Blogger* to capture not only language in the wild but also interactions *across multiple forms of literate activity* ([40], p. 13).

To be able to study the rich data in interaction between students, located in the computer lab, and the postings as they appear on *Blogger*, we have chosen to explore one specific case in detail. Analysis and interpretation of a specific case can afford data, which point to certain concrete, contextual knowledge, especially within a less researched field [41]. The pair of students selected for this in-depth study, differed strikingly from the other students. The analysis has a focus on what the dyad is doing, how and what they are discussing, how they are collaboratively negotiating on what to write on the blog and what pictures, links *etc.*, to post on the blog. Thus, the analyses aim at scrutinizing how

the two male students act in accordance with the temporary definition of the situation, and what this means for how they continue with their, in this case, collaborative online presentation of themselves.

In this research study we have followed the ethical codes as required from the Swedish Research Council. In addition, the Regional Ethical University Board has reviewed and approved the study before any fieldwork was conducted. The students were informed about the aims of the study, and participation was stressed as being voluntary. Informed consent was collected before the study started and all identities of the participants were made confidential. Questions concerning publicly accessible content on the Web and the integrity of the individuals in the research will continue to be a central issue from an ethical perspective, especially as social media can be closed groups as well as groups open for everyone.

8. The Trigger Activity

To start blogging we introduced an activity, which was published as a first posting. Aiming to open the space for the students' own engagement, the activity was introduced as a voluntary start, and students were at the same time encouraged to post anything they wanted. In other words, they were free to select any other focus than the one suggested. It was also suggested that they commented on each other's postings. What was made explicit was that no postings or comments would be assessed or graded. The first activity was labelled "Something" and was designed to open up for personal experiences and to trigger communication (*cf.* [24,26]).

Hi! The first blog should be about something that you would like to change or modify. Write about why you think that this "something" should be changed, and maybe with an alternative solution. Use images, links, videos *etc.*, to support your "something" ;-). To get comments it is of course a good idea to point at something that is controversial and it could also be effective to end with questions. Remember that it is just as important that you give comments on the other blogs! Looking forward to interesting comments!

The case study is based on two students, who were identified during analyses as displaying numerous intertwined activities in their postings and interactions. During the blogging they explore how to perform on line by involving multiple forms of literate activities [40], which is displayed both in their postings and in the interaction while negotiating on what to post and how to formulate the image of themselves. To enhance an understanding of the context, the two students' blogging, their interaction with each other, and connections to the other students in the computer lab, we have chosen to present the material partly as an ethnographic narrative that includes the students' dialogue, accompanied by specifically selected in-depth transcripts and screen shots from *Blogger*.

9. Results—The Case Poppe's and Indizz's Blog

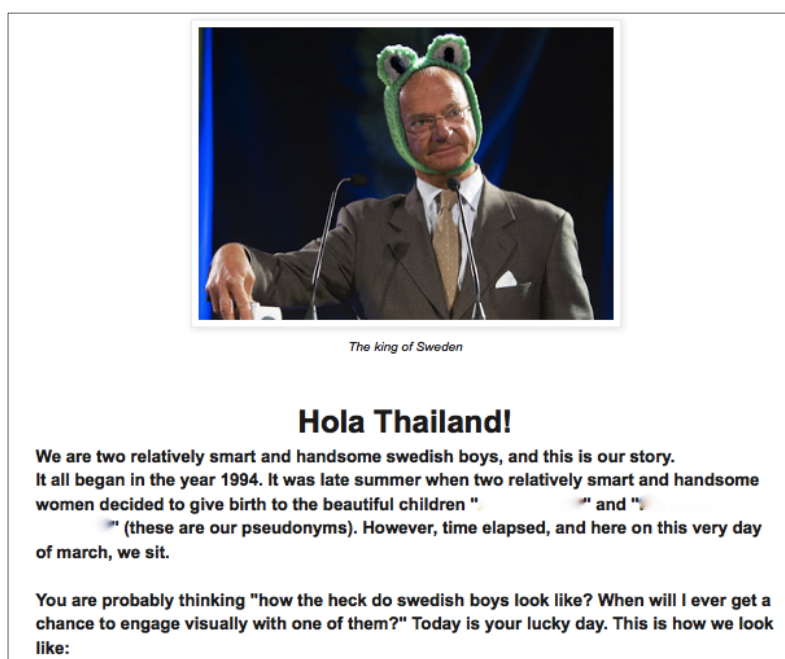
The two male students immediately start their own blog, which they named *Amor vincit omnia et nos cedamus amori*¹ and the posting titled *Somethang*. They both act under pseudonyms. The meaning of the concept *pseudonym* is initially discussed and they have to search the word on *Wikipedia* to come

¹ Love conquers all: Let us all yield to love.

to an agreement. Thus, their initial discussion about pseudonyms only addresses the meaning of the word and the choice of acting and communicating in *Blogger* under a pseudonym is taken for granted, which points to pseudo-anonymity as an aspect of blogging (*cf.* [10,33]).

During the whole lesson they both present and discuss questions and problems with a linguistic focus. A recurrent linguistic focal point is their interest in Latin proverbs. On a couple of occasions, Poppe engages in the search for more interesting alternatives on the Web. Even though this is one of their interests, besides the naming of their blog, Latin proverbs do not appear much in their communication or as postings. They use *Google Translate* to translate text into Thai but also to check what the other Swedish students have posted, translating from Thai into Swedish. *Google Translate* is also used for translating what someone else has posted in Latin, back to Swedish. When translating to Swedish it becomes obvious that *Google Translate* does not present an intelligible sentence, but they do not discuss the nonsensical sentence that appears on the screen. Throughout the blogging, Poppe and Indizz keep several tabs open on the screen, and besides *Google Translate*, they move between these various Web resources; *Wikipedia* in English, Web sites with photo montage and *Youtube*. A recurrent focal point is their interest in a Website with manipulated photos of the Swedish King. Initially they amuse themselves by scrolling up and down on the Website, displaying the King wearing various headgears such as a hat with elk horns, giraffe ears and an astronaut helmet. Among these, they early on decide upon a manipulated photo in which the King is wearing a green headgear with rabbit ears². Once decided upon, they copy and paste the photo into the posting they are working on (see Figure 1). By selecting this picture before they even have started to discuss what to write, it becomes clear how this humorous choice interrelates with their framing of the continuous activity (*cf.* [30]). The moving in and out of different web resources, the work with photos and their continuous co-construction of the text serves as explicit examples of their involvement in multiple forms of literate activities.

Figure 1. Poppe's and Indizz's first posting showing the Swedish King with rabbit ears.



² A brand connected to the Liseberg amusement park in Gothenburg.

After spending a couple of minutes, scrolling up and down on the Website with the Swedish King wearing silly headgear, they interrupt their activity and instead focus on their posting (see Excerpt 1). In their interaction they continuously switch between Swedish and English (utterances in English are marked with italics). Almost 5 minutes into the blogging activity the following interaction takes place:

Excerpt 1

1. Indizz ok now we need to write something
2. Poppe be greeted (.)
3. Indizz *greetings friends greeting friends*
we've gotta have something cool here (.) *greetings from Sweden*
4. Poppe hola (belgrad)
5. Indizz (.) where whe do they come from
6. Poppe thailand
this is our king he lives in sweden
7. Indizz biggest
8. Poppe hola thailand
but what the heck we need an exclamation mark
9. Indizz wha' are we gonna write there
10. Poppe *we are*
11. Indizz *two boys*
two swedish boys
e: borne two great
12. Poppe damn this is boring

Indizz's first utterance marks a shift from the choice of photomontage that is mocking the Swedish King, into their task of writing a blogpost. Poppe replies in Swedish by suggesting a quite formal introduction to their posting but importantly by adding an ironical tone to his intonation: be greeted (.) (line 2). This is taken up by Indizz, who responds in English with: "*greetings friends greeting friends*", followed by stating they need something "cool", and then switches into English to attribute the nationality of the greetings, which is greetings are coming from Sweden. Poppe's suggests "hola (belgrad)" (line 4), which probably relates to a humorous greeting to the Serbian organizers of the Eurovision Song Contest, uttered by a well-known Swedish comedian, who acted as the presenter of the Contest. The Swedish competition took place at the time of the case study presented here; a competition that usually draws much media attention, which could explain the references made by the students. There are similar references in the captured videos involving other students' blogging. In their negotiation, English is used when they formulate what to write on the blog, but the mixing of different languages is another sign of their involvement in multiple forms of literate activities, here characterized as language in the wild. This also illustrates the inclusion of certain terms in English brought in from the media into their digital vernacular [16], which becomes an integral communicative mode and a sense of normalcy associated to young people's use of certain expressions in English (*cf.* [42]).

The negotiation about their blogging, displayed above, is framed as taking place in a back region, in a playful way. As exemplified further below, the collaborative aspects of their performance are

apparent throughout their negotiation and in the initial turns above, the negotiation on how to present themselves online is conducted smoothly, that is, they agree that they wish to present themselves as much cooler than two students merely conducting a school task. Furthermore, there are few indications of any awareness concerning the online audience, which is displayed in the next line, when Indizz shows that he has not memorized the country they are going to share the blog with (.) “where whe do they come from” (line 5). Once Poppe has made clear that it is Thailand, they give their posting an introducing headline “Hola Thailand”. As the students continue their blogging activity, they take turns being in charge of the keyboard, there is less explicit negotiation going on, the emerging text in their posting is co-constructed in action rather than by talking. Poppe switches to English while constructing a sentence to explain who the man with the green rabbit ears is: “*this is our king he lives in Sweden*” (line 6), as necessary information. The negotiation of what to add to their ongoing posting, involves suggestions that are only spoken and either rejected implicitly or accepted in action, and then appearing on the screen. After Poppe’s greeting in Spanish to the Thai students, “hola Thailand” (line 8), he swears and claims that they must have an exclamation mark after the greeting. Indizz, not sure what to write then, turns to Poppe who suggests in English that they introduce themselves, which is immediately taken up by Indizz, leading to statements that together make “*we are two swedish boys*”, and adding a reference to someone who “*e: borne two great*” (line 11). This is not however what is finally written as their introduction (see Figure 1). Poppe objects about how they have presented themselves so far, which is made explicit switching into Swedish in line 12: “damn this is boring”. This indicates that it is important how they present themselves, and that the blog can be seen as a kind of front region [21]. The activity is framed in a less task-oriented manner in relation to the school context but rather framed by a collaborative endeavour to present themselves with an ironic, casual approach. Thereby they disregard respecting the rules of schooling, breaking the framing in accordance with doing school work and expressing themselves in a more playful way, taking the space to play with the language as in the carnival [19]. Already when the mocking picture of the Swedish King is chosen and the introductory lines are co-constructed, they have broken the schooling framing into a carnivalesque way of playing with their presentation.

Henceforth they keep playing with the their narration, thereby taking no notice of what was suggested as an initial activity, which was to write about something they would like to change. Instead they stick to an ironic and playful framing of presentation of selves, characterized by bantering, stating that they are “relatively smart and handsome”, and that their mothers once upon a time, decided to “give birth to the beautiful children”, that is themselves (*cf.* [29]). The reader is taken to the present time in the next line, *march*, and the next opening to the Thai students concerns the looks of Swedish males, together with a question about how to find out about their looks, as if the questions were posed by a Thai student, using *I*: “how the heck do swedish boys look like? When will I ever get a chance to engage visually with one of them?” The last question here is rhetorically posed, since they give the answer “Today is your lucky day”. By framing the activity with a kind of language use that is distinguished by hybridity between writing and speaking, it displays the multiple forms of literate activities involved and resembles what Davies [28] refers to as *performance across spaces*.

While Indizz and Poppe are co-writing the posting, the text appearing below the manipulated image of the Swedish King, they realize, by reading other postings appearing on *Blogger*, that instead of

everyone writing in individual blogs, there is a class blog. Discovering this, they come to the conclusion that few will find their blog, leading to a risk of getting no postings and comments from the others.

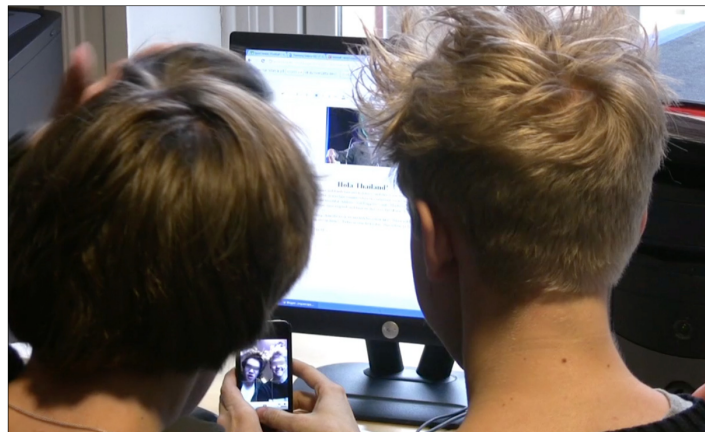
After fifteen minutes, their ongoing posting has been cut-and-pasted into the shared class blog. Emma, another student, passes behind Indizz and Poppe, and comments a couple of times that the manipulated mocking image of the Swedish King, will not be received positively by the Thai students. She puts emphasis on the statement saying it can even be dangerous since you are not allowed to comment and refer to the King in negative terms in Thailand. Earlier during the blogging activity, Indizz had asked their teacher whether they should be “honest or...”, to which the teacher replied they should be “socially nice”³. What this implies in relation to blogging as part of schooling is not made explicit, rather taken for granted since this does not lead to further questions from Indizz and Poppe. This opens up for negotiating the framing and taking control of the activity by making use of their digital vernacular and disregarding Emma’s comments.

Indizz and Poppe spend a couple of minutes editing a text appearing under the image of the King, and the posting they talk about as “*our story*”. Poppe suggests they take a picture of themselves together to show “*this is us*” (see Excerpt 2). Indizz turns this into action by holding his smartphone as they are posing to take a selfie of them together (see Figure 2).

Excerpt 2

1. Poppe it’s perfect
2. Indizz we’re gonna get all good rates

Figure 2. Poppe and Indizz looking at their selfie.



They move their heads closer and take some more pictures. They come to an agreement when Poppe says “it’s perfect” (line 1). Indizz expresses his expectations regarding getting rates, and that they are “gonna get all good rates” (line 2), once they upload their posting, that is how their posting will be seen in the front region by the others. Emma returns to stand behind them for a short while, repeating that their posting is problematic not only because the Thai students cannot say anything negative about their King, but also for other reasons.

³ Our translations of what was said in Swedish.

With the first statement “they won’t understand” (line 1, Excerpt 3), Emma reconnects to what she has mentioned earlier and draws the boys’ attention to the audience consisting of Thai students.

Excerpt 3

1. Emma they won’t understand
2. Indizz hahaha ((laughing))
3. Poppe hahaha ((laughing))
4. Indizz we’re not saying anything bad about the king he’s just wearing a silly hat

However, Indizz and Poppe have framed the space in *Blogger* by moving into the imaginative activity of carnival and their performance in the front region is framed as witty and ironic. Furthermore, while playing around with formulations and choosing images, they address, either consciously or subconsciously the local Swedish audience, that is their classmates (*cf.* [28]). Thus, in line with earlier findings on social media indicating that people often interact with friends they already have (e.g., [43]), the boys’ performance on *Blogger* is framed as if in a front region, but still the performance is mostly interconnected with the local audience. If every front region has its own back region [21], the fact that the classmates are in the same physical room points to an interesting blurring of front and back regions. The fellow students in the classroom are regarded as a front region audience online while simultaneously being a back region in the physical setting of the computer lab in the school. The two boy’s students’ performance is for an online audience, however also very much present in the same physical context, the computer lab.

Indizz and Poppe spend some time on editing and manipulating their photo, and before making it public, they take a short break to read other postings. Before performing themselves they want to see how their classmates perform on the blog. While scrolling up and down, and reading, they are laughing. After reading some of the postings, Poppe says with emphasis “*damn how boring all postings are is there no one who has seen ours*”. They look at some postings and rates some, choosing from those given reactions, *funny*, *interesting*, *cool* and *crazy*. When returning to their posting the following dialogue (Excerpt 4) takes place:

Excerpt 4

1. Indizz we can’t lower the standards
2. Poppe no
3. Indizz but check here *often not* it’s fun to post
4. Poppe we’ve got this one have we got any *rates*
check this
5. Indizz we can write it’s from me if I write
6. Poppe we’ve we haven’t got any *rates*
7. Indizz but update update
no one’s liking ours
8. Poppe yeah but what do think about one comment
9. Indizz ye:s

10. Poppe *rate eight on left*
11. Indizz *je:s*
12. Poppe *duck*
13. Indizz I got the highest
14. Poppe hahaha ((laughing))
insecure sexy look boy hahaha ((laughing))

Indizz's statement "we can't lower the standards" (line 1, Excerpt 4), points to their primary framing of their performance as cool guys, which does not correspond with their classmates' performances that at this stage more have the character of being informative and argumentative, conforming to the trigger for the first activity. The excerpt above also indicates that the two students mirror their performance in relation to the other students' understanding, it is important to get good rates, that is, it is important that a posting is liked by several people. This, in turn, causes Indizz, in line 5, to suggest that he can log in on his account (they are logged in as Poppe) and rate their own shared posting: "we can write it's from me if I write".

Later, as the teacher passes by, the manipulated photo of the King is seen on the screen, and below is the edited photo, the selfie, of the two students. Indizz turns to the teacher and starts a dialogue (Excerpt 5):

Excerpt 5

1. Indizz we've been told that the culture in Thailand is like that that you shouldn't mock royalties
2. Teacher yes exactly
3. Indizz maybe it isn't so correct
4. Teacher no
5. Indizz we're supposed to communicate our culture
6. Teacher that you're mocking the king
7. Indizz yeah
8. Poppe they're gonna think we're so cool

Once again we see in Excerpt 5 that the two students want to present themselves as cool in the front region. In relation to the blog, the interaction with the teacher can be regarded as taking place in a more back region. This illustrates that the broad contexts of front regions and back regions are situational and relational and cannot be predefined. While the interaction in the computer lab in a school setting can be understood as a front region since what is taking place there is done in relation to the teacher and the other classmates, this region can also be framed as a back region in relation to the blog.

Poppe and Indizz continue throughout the class to play the carnival by commenting other's postings, surfing the Internet, and checking their ratings and comments now and then. The final activity before class is over, is to return to their posting, and Indizz rates their contribution (Excerpt 6):

Excerpt 6

1. Indizz I think we did clearly the best (...) it's enough with one posting quality is bigger than quantity or in one sense it is (...) *how awesome*

His final evaluation of their mutual, collaboratively negotiated performance and how they have framed their posting is pointed out as “clearly the best” (Excerpt 6). The recurrent discussions about the appropriateness of mocking the Swedish King, and how this might be understood by the Thai students, is nothing the two students touch upon in their evaluation of their own blogging.

In this activity Indizz and Poppe play the roles of the carnival pageants and as such they play important roles in becoming *ritual spectacles* ([19], p. 5), one of the distinct forms of the carnival culture that makes it possible to frame the activity as a playful event even for the other students. This will be illustrated below by displaying how another couple of students shift their framing from one of completing a school task to a more carnivalesque framing once they have seen Indizz’s and Poppe’s blogpost (a more in-depth study of Nicole’s and Tom’s interaction is to be published elsewhere).

10. Other Students Discover Indizz’s and Poppe’s Blogpost

Once Nicole and Tom in the excerpt below have published their first posting on *Blogger*, they start scrolling the screen to see the others’ postings, comparing them to their own (Excerpt 7).

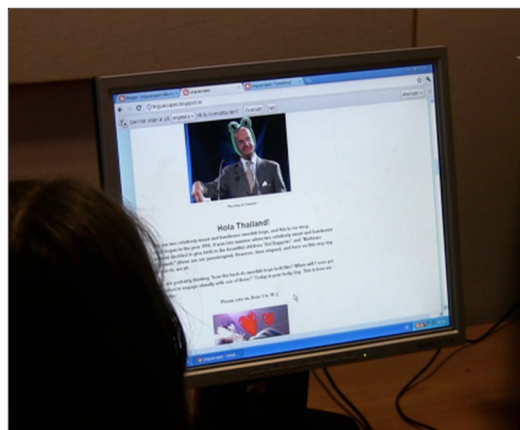
Excerpt 7

1. Nicole now let’s check what everyone else has written there
2. Tom I think we’ve done the most most eh: vikings
3. Nicole serious
4. Tom yeah the most serious *the swedish so society* (oh)
5. Nicole who wrote these (which)

When they start to read the other postings on the blog, their shared opinion is that they have made “the most serious posting” which Nicole states (line 3, Excerpt 7) by completing Tom’s utterance before. Their own posting is about the issue of unemployment among young people in Sweden, following the suggestion of writing about something they would like to change, which Tom mentions in line 4 “*the swedish so society*” and reinforces that it is the most serious posting.

Nicole continues to scroll the page for a minute and stops at the bottom of Indizz’s and Poppe’s blogpost (Figure 3 below) and the following interaction (Excerpt 8) occurs:

Figure 3. Screenshot of the posting including a picture of the Swedish King.



Excerpt 8

1. Tom *please follow on twitter*
2. Tom no stop it
3. Nicole *we-go-we-go-we-go*
4. Nicole shall we make a new posting (.) a funny posting
5. Tom Indizz ((laughing))
6. Tom *someth(a)ng* ((laughing, scrolling up an down))

Nicole scrolls down on the page and Tom reads aloud where it says “*please follow on twitter*” (in Excerpt 8). Then Nicole scrolls up and when Tom sees the picture of the Swedish King with rabbit ears he exclaims no stop it (line 2), in a laughing voice. This inspires Nicole to suggest that they make another more humorous posting; “*we-go-we-go-we-go*” and “shall we make a new posting (.) a funny posting”. Tom continues to read the nickname of one of the boys Indizz and the title “*someth(a)ng*”, which is an ironic uptake of the title, “Something”, the suggested activity. While Tom is reading aloud they are both laughing, inspired by the playful, norm-breaking framing of this blog indicating a framing that is otherwise unacceptable for a school task that becomes legitimate in carnival [19]. This opens up for them to engage in new postings where they discuss how to frame the activity, how to re-create the context of the activity, and how far they can transgress the boundaries of the school-task and move into language in the wild. Tom begins by suggesting a really norm-breaking posting of a pornographic Website which is fiercely rejected by Nicole and they end up playing it safe by posting recipes of Swedish buns and pictures of a Swedish amusement park.

To conclude, the two male students who are the main focus of this study, frame the activity by making use of their digital vernacular displaying a kind of language in the wild. A significant result is the rather unusual collaborative performance since they write their blog posts in pairs. To make a joint presentation of selves requires different kinds of negotiation than trying out a presentation individually, pointing to other specific possibilities and limitations related to the specific context of schooling. The activity is furthermore framed as taking place in a front region, where it is most crucial how they are perceived by their classmates. This is explicitly noticeable in Indizz’s and Poppe’s carnivalesque framing in their ironic narration but mostly in their posting of the mocking picture of the Swedish King and the discussion that follows both with a classmate and with the teacher. Thus, the boundaries between what can be said to be the outer front region, consisting of everyone with access to the blog, gain less importance for their performance, which gradually transformed into a kind of back-region style (*cf.* [21], p. 128), in other words, the boundaries between the two regions are recurrently re-defined in the interaction.

11. Discussion

Once social media is introduced in institutional educational contexts, a shift of framing from the private room to a more public one occurs, since the classroom, in this case the computer lab, is a public room in itself. The distinctions between front and back regions, which have previously been easier to distinguish, are accordingly challenged in many ways. Every front region creates new opportunities for

its own back region [33]. The students' definition of the activity is continuously negotiated in terms of how they wish to present themselves to their classmates as the main intended audience.

The results from the study demonstrate how the students use language across multiple forms of literate activities, and how these uses connect and interplay to serve the students' interests to perform and present themselves as multilingual and witty, characterized by language in the wild (*cf.* [16]). The language is distinguished by moving in and out of resources on the Web, and by the use of their vernacular practices [28], more explicitly linked to linguistics in the notion of digital vernaculars [15–17].

The students are continuously reframing the activity. We suggest this can serve to exemplify *role distance* in Goffmanian term [32]. By both in talk as well as in the posting the students distance themselves from what this specific situation demands, when seen as an activity framed by schooling. The students' posting becomes an example of how they resist any definition of the situation, making use of their digital vernacular utilizing language in the wild, that is bantering by playing ironically with their own performance, laughing, posing together for a selfie, one in which is pouting his lips and the other is trying to look sexy in a self-mocking activity.

By collaboratively playing with languages, both in the written format in their posting as text, and when collaboratively co-constructing with the use of Web resources, the two students turn their performance into a framing of a carnivalesque presentation of self. This is demonstrated in the creation of the posting, their spoken interaction during the creation, and the posting as such. The context of schooling that obliges them to work in pairs also implicates that they negotiate both in their native language but also in on how to formulate themselves, what kind of expressions to use etc. to display their mutual desired presentation of self. Throughout the activity, the language used illustrates a norm-breaking mocking, ironic, playful and carnivalesque style [19] and English is used as integral for a certain kind of social talk (*cf.* [42]). That this style can be discussed as language in the wild shared by other students and used for performance, is seen when the other student pair sees the posting with the Swedish King, and starts negotiating about how far to stretch their norm-breaking boundaries. Previous studies have correspondingly shown that a more open approach to communication and interaction within the instructional practices, is often initiated by one or a few students' norm-breaking, playing with the language, crossing the boundaries of the communicative practice of schooling (e.g., [12,13]).

When living the carnival, not only does the language display a playful approach, but the posing for a selfie and manipulating with it, painting roses, hearts and flowers in vivid colours, also indicate self-irony in the posing of how they want to be seen. Even though they perform for the front stage, the *Blogger*, it is in the local context, the classroom, that they seek to be rated. The classroom, thus, can be seen as both back and front stage, thereby blurring spaces. Furthermore, the interaction is distinguished by a continuous performance across spaces where the language use is a combination of written and oral communication, aspects of spoken and written language interplay with each other (*cf.* [28]). The two students' interaction and communication during the blogging activity, support previous research on the use of social media in education, which exemplify that students act across spaces to interlink everyday off- and online practices for their own purposes (e.g., [24,29,30]).

The results from our in-depth and focused analysis indicate that there are several aspects of the students' language in the wild, indicating that when students take the space as theirs it undoubtedly has an impact of the uses of language. Thus, the uses of language on display in this study, illustrate that

the social performance, *living the carnival*, here overrules a more traditional framing of English learning activities.

12. Conclusions

By applying Goffman's and Bakhtin's concepts as analytical tools for interaction and communication we have illustrated that already from the beginning, the students used the blogging space to present the image of themselves, playing with the language, going in and out of resources, thereby contributing to the front stage and the back stage being blurred. Above all, the local context, performance in the physical space, that is the classroom, is closely interlinked with the on-line performance. In line with Prior's and Thorne's [40] arguments for the need to investigate writing *across multiple forms of literate activity* ([40], p. 13) our results point to the complexity and multidimensional aspects of performing your social self in social media.

What characterized the results were the uses of language, that is, language in the wild, framing the activity by role distance, and ignoring any implicit traditional framing in relation to the context of schooling. Once the activity was open for interpretation, the students lived the carnival by posting, ridiculing and mocking photomontage, including themselves in self-mockery, in a bantering mode, while performing across spaces. Interestingly, the norm-breaking activity, here exemplified in a posting, when discovered by two other students, functioned as a trigger for other students to join the carnivalesque use of language. Though only presenting a very limited number of students' blogging, the study can, by taking an in-depth micro sociological and interactional perspective, contribute to the growing understanding of the conditions for the activity of creating a text and the uses of languages in social media, in particular when the activities derive from students' uses rather than framing in accordance with domain traditions, such as languages taught and learned. What this indicates however for schooling still remains an open question in need of further research. An interesting way to move this field forward, could be not only to look at the students' uses of languages, but bring into question, whether the traditional focus on the content of what to learn and teach, can be revisited in the light of results from an increasing number of research studies on language uses in social media.

Acknowledgments

The research reported here was funded by the Marcus and Amelia Foundation and conducted within the University of Gothenburg Learning and Media Technology Studio (LETStudio), and the Linnaeus Centre for Research on Learning, Interaction and Mediated Communication in Contemporary Society (LinCS). We wish to convey our thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on a former version of this article.

Author Contributions

The manuscript has been produced collaboratively between the two co-authors Sylvi Vigmo and Annika Lantz-Andersson. We have been jointly and equally responsible for the research design, data collection, analyses and writing of this article.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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