

Approaches to Crafting English as a Second Language on Social Media: An Ethnographic Case Study from Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Saudi female undergraduates perform various activities in English, their second language (L2), on social media. They engage in different types of writing and reading on social media in everyday life. But little is known about the material resources and concrete activities they drew on as they read and write in English on their preferred social media. This ethnographic case study aims to examine the material resources and concrete activities of a group of Saudi female undergraduates majoring in English Translation in a university in Saudi Arabia as they use English on social media. This study particularly aims to answer this research question: What material resources and concrete activities do Saudi female undergraduates employ as they read and write in English on social media? A total of eleven female Saudi undergraduates took part in this research. Online observation, focus group interviewing, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and online logbook of English usage were employed over a three-months period to collect data. This study draws on Literacy Studies (LS), that understand literacies as social practices involving more than technical skills. Analysing the data thematically revealed that these undergraduates drew on three main approaches: English-spelling checking approaches, English grammar-checking approaches and English-meaning checking approaches. The study recommends that language learners are encouraged to use Google app, Google Translate app, Dictionary apps and the COCA website to correct, craft and improve their English. They are also encouraged to utilise the built-in smartphone technologies that supports English spelling.

Keywords: approaches to English, connective ethnography, English as L2, Saudi female undergraduates, social media

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Introduction

Social media took off in Saudi Arabia and Saudis have been reported to be avid social media users (Fouad, 2015). According to Hubbard (2015), Social media have boomed in Saudi Arabia due to the fast Internet and the extremely restrictive social codes that limit Saudis' public life.

Social media consumes a considerable amount of time in Saudis' everyday life. Alkhatnai (2016) indicates that half of Saudi undergraduates of both genders who study English at King Saud University spend 20–30 hours per week on social media. Kutbi (2015) explores females in particular and reports that the majority of these Saudi undergraduates spent around five hours per day on social media. This indicates that Saudi females spend a long time on social media.

English in Saudi Arabia is the second Language (L2) and Arabic is the first Language (L1). According to Dewaele (2017), the dichotomy of L2 is “the substitution of non-native speaker” “p.4” and the native language is the L1. Thus, English in Saudi Arabia is the L2 as Arabic is L1.

In terms of English use on Social media, Salem (2017) indicates that English was used more than Arabic by 18.3 per cent of users on Instagram in all Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, and the use of English on Facebook increased by 7.6 per cent. To be more specific, 50.5 per cent of Saudi female undergraduates were reported to use English on Instagram, whereas 27 per cent used English on the whole range of social media platforms on an everyday basis - personal communication (Albawardi, 2017). Therefore, the use of English on social media by young people seems to be common in Saudi Arabia.

What is 'social media'?

The term 'social media' is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “websites and applications which enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (Social media, 2018). In this paper, 'social media' refers to Internet-based apps that connect participants to one or several other participants by (1) enabling content creation, (2) allowing a list of people to be friends and be friends to and (3) sharing content in any form with different audiences. Examples of social media are Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and Path.

Research Question

This paper is guided by the following research question:

What material resources and concrete activities do Saudi female undergraduates employ as they read and write in English on social media?

'Material resources and concrete activities' refer to the resources and activities Saudi female undergraduates employ to assist them in learning the meaning of English words or improving their capability in English when they read social media content on their smartphones. They also refer to the resources and activities these participants draw on to check the accuracy of their spelling, grammar and use of words before they actually write their words on social media using their smartphones.

Literature Review

Literacy Studies (LS)

Two perspectives on literacy were identified in the literature: a skills-based view and a social practice view. Each perspective will be explained in this section, followed by presenting the view of literacy this paper embraces.

In the skills-based view, literacy is seen as a set of discrete skills that reside in the individual (Papen, 2005). This skills-based view of literacy is germane to the 'autonomous model' of literacy (Street, 1984). The idea of an 'autonomous model' of literacy emerged when Street (1984) conducted an ethnographic study of Iranian villagers. He states that 'illiterate' people, according to a label given by institutions in that village, performed various literacy activities in their everyday lives that were different from the literacy activities taught in educational settings. These literacies are used in Iranian society and in Quranic schools. Literacy in the 'autonomous model' is seen as a neutral variable that can be learned out of context in formal settings. Barton (2007) explains that embracing this view of literacy is associated with learning and the practice of schooling. Literacy in this view can be broken down into skills that can be taught to individuals and later tested. Treating reading and writing as a set of skills assists educators in their methods of instruction and their methods of testing. An example of this view is to assess reading in terms of vocabulary choice and assess writing in terms of correct spelling and grammar. In this way, methods of assessing reading and writing, such as grading, testing and evaluating, can be systematically closely linked to the way of teaching. Measuring and abstracting such skills away from the individual then becomes an autonomous view of literacy, removing assessment from an authentic context of social practice.

This skills-based view of literacy is narrow as it does not look at reading and writing that originate outside institutions and relate to social and cultural aspects of literacy. Thus, the reading and writing that Saudi female undergraduates do on social media in English are not seen as literacy.

The second perspective on literacy is the social practice view. This is the Literacy Studies (LS) view which relates reading and writing to the wider social context in which these activities occur (Barton, 2001, 2007; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1984, 1993). Viewing literacy as a social practice, according to Barton (2001), came about as a reaction to the dissatisfaction with viewing reading and writing in terms of cognitive skills, as these are "based on over-simplistic psychological models" "p.93". Thus, the social aspect of literacy is acknowledged and the idea of conceptualising reading and writing as purely decoding and encoding scripts is seen as insufficiently narrow. This view is referred to by Street (1984) as the 'ideological model' of literacy. Literacy in the 'ideological model' is not seen as merely neutral and technical skills, but as a social practice that is tied to people's values, social attitudes and prevailing discourses (Street, 1993).

This study draws on Street's (1993) 'ideological model' of literacy that sees literacy as a social practice and thus provides a wider lens on literacy. The 'ideological model' entails a holistic view of the various purposes, sources and contexts wherein people make sense of their literacy activities. This perspective starts with what people do with literacy in their everyday lives (Barton, 2007).

The skills-based view of literacy is the prevailing model in Saudi Arabia. It is, therefore, the model that the studies presented in the following section embrace although the researchers in these studies do not, of course, identify themselves as drawing on the ‘autonomous model’ of reading and writing.

English as L2 on Social Media in Saudi Arabia

Researching social media literacies seems to attract researchers in Saudi Arabia. The paradigm they draw on, however, is different. In Saudi Arabia, using social media in English is largely approached through the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) paradigm. According to Levy (1997) Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) refers to “the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning” “p.1”. Language learning within the CALL paradigm is germane to the skills-based view of literacy (Barton, 2007; Papen, 2005). Language learning is conceptualised as a separate skill of reading and writing a specific linguistic system. Reading and writing are treated as skills that can be broken down into parts that can be assessed and supported in educational settings.

The use of WhatsApp in learning English was explored by several researchers. For example, Alsaleem (2013) explores the effects of using WhatsApp on the writing performance in English of 30 Saudi female undergraduates majoring in English Language Translation at a Saudi Arabian University. The participants were pre-tested and post-tested on writing topics in English and two teachers (not the researcher) assessed the participants’ writing competency using a rubric. Alsaleem (2013) asserts that the participants’ test results in the post-test outperformed their pre-test on their vocabulary choices. Similarly, Fattah (2015) explores the effectiveness of using WhatsApp to improve the writing skills of Saudi undergraduates majoring in English at a Saudi Arabia university. Fattah’s study is quasi-experimental in nature and involves 30 students studying an ‘Essay Writing’ course over 45 days. Fattah states that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the post-test. Fattah (2015) surmises that the experimental group benefited from using the WhatsApp group. Bensalem (2018), however, focuses on the effect of WhatsApp on improving the learners’ capacity in English vocabulary. He conducted a six-week experimental research program to explore the impact of using a WhatsApp group on learning vocabulary in English with 40 undergraduates in a Saudi Arabian university. Bensalem points out that that the experimental group that used the WhatsApp group to learn English vocabulary outperformed the control group in the post-test.

The use of WhatsApp group to learn English was explored from a different perspective by Almekhlafy and Alzubi (2016). They investigate the use of a WhatsApp group as a learning setting where English must be the only language used by group members. Their research involves 40 Saudi male undergraduates and four English native language teachers at Najran University in the WhatsApp group. This study was conducted over four months and employed the observation of conversations, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Their research states that the students posted and shared content from their surrounding environment as well as discussing local issues that sparked the interest of Saudi males.

Besides WhatsApp, other social media were explored to learn English. For instance, Ahmed (2016), explores the use of Facebook group in learning English. She conducted three-months experimental research to investigate the effects of using a Facebook group to learn English grammar

and improve the writing skills of female Saudi undergraduates in Saudi Arabia. Ahmed (2016) asserts that participants improved their grammar and writing skills by “(1) reading the comments and posts from their peers; (2) being able to identify their own and their friends’ writing mistakes and correct them; (3) discussing incorrect grammar with Facebook friends; and (4) by responding to classmates’ comments and posts” “p.942”.

In addition to Facebook, YouTube and Twitter were explored by Kutbi (2015). She examines three social media platforms namely Twitter, Facebook and YouTube and how 25 Saudi female undergraduates view these platforms as a learning tool. Kutbi (2015) indicates that 84 per cent of the participants were ‘extremely satisfied’ with their experience of using social media to supplement their learning. She also indicates that posting on social media has improved the participants writing skills, as the course instructor demanded they use standard English in their posts. The course instructor also corrects the students’ spelling and grammar mistakes, if detected, for each post.

Alnujaidi (2017), however, explores the effectiveness of ten social media platforms in learning English language from the point of view of English language students through quantitative measures. He points out that most of the participants expressed their confidence and desire to use social networking sites to learn English. He also points out that most of the participants strongly agreed that social networking sites gave them greater access to credible information from English speaking countries and made the process of learning English more fun.

As can be seen, these studies were limited in their methods to experiments followed by questionnaires, the use of experiments with structured interviews, or the use of questionnaires. They did not use ethnographic tools and referred to participants’ activities on social media as an English language learning process. The studies conducted by Fattah (2015), Kutbi (2015), Ahmed (2016) were limited by the use of social media in relation to teaching a specific English language course to undergraduate students majoring in English. Fattah (2015) and Ahmed (2016) replaced the classroom walls with a group via social media to deliver English learning materials in their experimental groups of participants while Kutbi (2015) and Bensalem (2018) supplemented a face-to-face course with social media. Alnujaidi’s (2017) study, however, explored the views of undergraduate students of both genders, doing various majors, regarding using social media to offer English language learning materials.

These studies limited the participants’ choices of the social media they could use. Alsalem (2013), Fattah (2015), Almekhlafy and Alzubi (2016), and Bensalem (2018) offered a WhatsApp group, Ahmed (2016) offered a Facebook group, Kutbi (2015) offered three platforms and Alnujaidi (2017) asked their participants to rank ten specific social media platforms according to their use. Kutbi (2015), Ahmed (2016), Almekhlafy and Alzubi (2016), and Bensalem (2018) required their participants to use standard English, while Alnujaidi (2017) asked the participants about their views regarding the social media platforms that helped them learn English and did not ask them to disclose other social media platforms they were active on where they used or learnt English.

These studies emerged from a cognitive paradigm of understanding literacy, that is, conceiving of reading and writing as acquired skills, decontextualized from everyday life. These studies explored the potential of using social media in English language learning to supplement or

replace a classroom setting for teaching a course or offering materials. Additionally, these studies did not start from the participants' own usage of English on social media and did not use the lens of Literacy Studies. In this study, posting and browsing content on social media is viewed as a form of social practice. Reading and writing are not examined as formal English nor as the ability to decode or encode a set of linguistic expressions in standard English. Social media is used as a setting in which Saudi undergraduates use English in their daily life.

Research Design

A connective approach to ethnography was used to collect offline and online evidence (Leander & McKim, 2003) over three months, from October to December 2016. Ethnography is a methodology in which several research tools are used to paint a comprehensive detailed picture of people's literacy in everyday life (Barton, 2007) and this study aimed to get a holistic picture of the material resources and concrete activities Saudi female undergraduates drew on while using English in their preferred social media spaces. Ethnographic data was collected through online observation, a focus group interviewing, two sessions of semi-structured interviews, informal interviews and an online logbook to track participants' activity in English.

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants (Bryman, 2008; Dörnyei, 2007) and the first participant was used as a key informant to recommend others who use English on social media on a daily basis and were willing to participate in this study. This is what Georgalou (2015) refers to as 'a friend of a friend' sampling. In total, eleven Saudi female undergraduates studying English Translation participated (three of them agreed to participate only in the focus group conducted over WhatsApp, and one withdrew after participating in the face-to-face focus-group interview). Information sheets were provided to all participants and consent forms were collected ensuring that participation in the study was voluntary and the identities of these Saudis were protected and anonymised. These Saudis chose their pseudonyms and their real names were not kept in the observational notes.

Data was analysed by combining Saldaña's (2016) coding approaches with Schreier's (2014) 'qualitative content analysis' method. Themes were developed from coding the data to answer the research question. In other words, coding helped to generate themes that are the "outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 198). The process of data analysis has been greatly aided by ATLAS.ti. software. ATLAS.ti provided the tools to create relationships between codes, raise queries, export queried information in tables and link multiple segments of data through meaning as well as with coding (Friese, 2014).

Results

The material resources and concrete activities Saudi female undergraduates draw on as they use English are situated in their social practices. These concrete activities and material resources are arranged according to their aims into English-spelling checking approaches, English grammar-checking approaches and English-meaning checking approaches.

English-spelling Approaches

When writing in English on social media, participants paid particular attention to their spelling. These participants draw on technologies built into their smartphones and by using particular apps.

Participants use the predictive built-in keyboard to check their spelling. A predictive keyboard refers to the text bar that appears above the keyboard predicting words being typed on a smartphone. It is important to stress that the predictive keyboard is a technology built into smartphones, not a unique feature of social media.

This predictive keyboard was used along with other resources to check the correct spelling. For example, Latifah refers to the words predicted by her smartphone keyboard as '*pop-up words*' (informal interview 1) as she gives her account on writing in English on Twitter. It seems that '*pop-up words*' is a resource that Latifah usually uses as she did not mention having a red squiggly line under the misspelled word. In fact, Latifah associates her use of a predictive keyboard with the use of Google Translate app on her smartphone. Latifah indicates that she checks a spelling by typing a word in Google Translate app. If the word is translated from English into Arabic, this would indicate that the word is spelled correctly, if not it indicates that the word is misspelled.

Norah and Latifah report that they use a '*spell checker*' among the on-screen activities they are involved with as they use English on social media. However, 'spell-checker' is not the same for Norah and Latifah. Norah, in interview (2), defines 'spell-checker' as a built-in smartphone feature where a red squiggly line appears under a misspelled word and tapping the misspelled word usually suggests a correct spelling of that word. Latifah, in interview 2, defines 'spell checker' as a predictive keyboard that predicts a word being typed.

Lama, in interview (1), indicates that she uses the same smartphone feature, that is a '*spelling checker*'. Similar to Norah, Lama defines 'spelling checker' as the red squiggly line that appears under a misspelled word and on tapping the misspelled word the correct spelling is usually suggested. She further indicates that if the spell checker did not suggest a correct spelling, she types the misspelled word in Google app, and this usually results in providing her with the correct spelling. It appears that Lama was not familiar with a predictive keyboard, unlike Norah and Latifah. This, of course, seems to imply that a predictive keyboard is not widely used, as Latifah would argue.

Norah seems to follow a unified spell-checking process before Tweeting in English. Norah, in informal interview (2), details her step-by-step spell-checking process before tweeting 'In desperate need of a break'. In step (1), she uses a predictive keyboard, if it does not work well she moves to step (2), which is tapping the word with a red squiggly line under it to see a suggested spelling, and if this does not work she moves to step (3), which is copying and pasting the word into Google app to see suggested words, and if this too does not work, the final step is to write the word in Arabic in Google Translate app and see the English equivalent.

Typing on Google app using the keyboard to check correct spelling was mentioned by Norah, Lama, Latifah, Deema and Rawan. Nouf, however, indicates in interview (2) that she uses Google app to check her spelling quickly in a different way. She states that she uses her voice to search for the correct spelling on Google app by tapping on the microphone while saying the word. The word then appears spelled correctly without Nouf having to touch letters on the keyboard with her fingers. This implies that writing on a smartphone can be accomplished in a different way, which is by using one's own voice and tapping the microphone on Google app, instead of touching the smartphone screen to select letters from the keyboard.

English Grammar-checking Approaches

The interview data show that English grammar-checking approaches are carried out using Google app, a corpus website, asking a person for specific information and searching content on Twitter where the account holder uses English as their L1.

Norah, in informal interview (1), describes how she checks her grammar using Google app. She begins by writing a sentence on Google app and searching for the same sentence. For her, finding a sentence in the same order indicates that the sentence is grammatically correct. It seems that using Google app to check if a sentence is grammatically correct is an advanced way of using Google app to check a misspelled word. The latter concerns the appearance of one word, but the former concerns the appearance of a group of words in the same order on several websites.

Deema, in interview (1), indicates that she uses a corpus website to check her choice of prepositions. She explains that she goes to the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) website, searches for a specific word and sees the words that appear with it. She demonstrated her approach by opening her smartphone and typing the corpus website address in Safari. She gave an example of the verb 'fill' and wanted to know which preposition goes with it, as she was confused between 'in' and 'out'. Figure 1.A illustrates how Deema checked her choice of preposition that comes with the two words "fill" and "form" by tapping 'search', then tapping 'collocates' and writing the two words in the allocated spaces and tapping 'find collocates'. After that, she was taken to another website page (see Fig. 1.B) and could see all the prepositions that can be used with her desired words in context.



Figure 1. Screenshots of Deema checking her comprehensive use of prepositions through the COCA website

Deema indicates that seeing words in context has helped her in choosing appropriate prepositions. She points out that she was taught to use the COCA website in one of her courses at university. It seems that Deema applied one of the techniques she used as a student to check her

appropriate use of prepositions before writing in English on Twitter as part of her literacy techniques.

Asking someone to check if a sentence is comprehensible grammatically before writing on Twitter was mentioned by Deema and Latifah. Deema indicates in interview (1) that she asks her friends if a sentence she intends to use on Twitter is grammatically correct. She explains that she usually asks her friend Emma by contacting her over WhatsApp app or asking her face-to-face. Deema writes a sentence on WhatsApp app and asks her friend whether the sentence has any grammatical errors or not; she speaks the sentence orally if Emma is present with her in a physical space.

It seems that Deema uses an online space, WhatsApp app, to contact her friend in order to ask her about the correct grammatical structure of a specific sentence and does not care about making grammatical errors on WhatsApp. Deema was not the only participant to ask someone about grammar as Latifah followed the same approach. Latifah, in informal interview (1), indicates that she would usually ask her sister orally in a physical space about whether a sentence had any grammatical errors or not before writing it in English on Twitter. It appears that Latifah only uses her sister to check her grammar, as she does not use any other resources.

Nouf, in interview (1), indicates that she searches Twitter to check her proper grammar usage in English before posting on social media. She explains that she writes a specific sentence or phrase and searches on Twitter to see if 'native speakers' of English have ever used that phrase before, and if she finds the phrase this indicates that it is grammatically correct. By 'native speakers', Nouf means those people whose L1 is English. It appears that Nouf uses Twitter content written by people whose L1 is English as a resource for proper grammar usage. In this way, Twitter content is treated as a corpus representing how English is used in real everyday life, away from English grammar books.

English-meaning Checking Approaches

The interview and focus group data show that checking the meaning of English words as participants read or write posts on social media is done through Google app, Google Translate app, dictionary apps and corpus websites.

Google app was used to check the meaning of words in English. For example, Nouf, in interview (1), indicates that she uses Google app to search for the meaning of a specific word before writing it in English on social media. For Nouf, finding a word on several sites indicates that the word exists and reading that word in context helps her to guess its meaning. Emma, in interview (2), indicates that she checks the meaning of a specific word if she reads it, without intending to write it, on social media. Emma draws on a similar approach to Nouf's approach by using Google app. Emma memorises the spelling of a specific word and then types it in Google app to search for it. She then guesses the meaning of that word by reading it in context.

Google Translate app was used to check the meanings of specific words. Latifah, in interview (1), indicates that she uses Google Translate app to check the meaning of the English word by typing

that word and seeing the equivalent in Arabic. For her, this is the most appropriate way to discover the meaning of an English word before writing it on Twitter.

From the focus group conducted over WhatsApp, Sawsan indicates that she uses four resources to check the meaning of a specific word as she reads on Twitter. These resources are all smartphone apps. She uses Google app, Google Translate app and two different dictionary apps to check the meaning of what she refers to as '*a difficult word*'. She explains that she searches for the meaning of a word by copying and pasting it into four different smartphone apps. She indicates that both Google Translate and Almaany are smartphone apps that give the equivalent of a specific word in Arabic, while the Dictionary and Google apps give the meaning of a specific word in English, as well as putting that word in context.

Deema, in interview (1), indicates that she uses the COCA website to check the meaning of "*new*" English words. Deema explains that she accesses the COCA website from her smartphone's search engine, not an app, then types a specific word and taps search. She illustrates this approach with an example by typing the word 'aim', then tapping search and then tapping context. She is then moved to another page showing the word 'aim' in context in different sentences. Deema notes that reading a word in context enables her to guess the meaning of a particular word. Deema applies one of the techniques she learned in one of her courses to check the meaning of English words she encounters while reading on social media.

Discussion

This study identified a mixture of material resources and concrete activities female Saudi undergraduates drew on as they read and write in English on social media. These material resources and concrete activities were divided according to their aim into three approaches: English-spelling approaches; English grammar-checking approaches; and English meaning checking approaches;

These findings fill a gap in the literature identified by Barton & Potts (2013) when they asserted that research on language learner's practices in L2 on online spaces are 'very limited' "p.818". These findings also contribute to those of Vázquez & Cassany's (2016) findings in an additional aspect. Vázquez & Cassany (2016) examine the digital language practice of six teachers in Catalonia and point out that these teachers taught students to use dictionaries, automated translation software and grammar and spelling checkers. Vázquez & Cassany (2016) also point out the names of dictionaries as in DRAE and WordReference and to websites such as Wikipedia but not how language learners use these materials resources themselves. Participants in the current study mentioned smartphone apps and COCA website and clarified what they mean with 'spelling checker' not grammar checker.

This study also found that participants enabled two built-in smartphone features to assist them in checking their spelling in English. These two smartphone features had to be activated from the general setting relating to English keyboard (see Fig. 2).



Figure 2. The two English keyboard features that were used to check spelling

As figure 2 shows, these features are ‘Check Spelling’ and ‘Predictive’. The check spelling feature spellchecks the words as participants type and automatically underlines the misspelled word with a red squiggly line (see Fig.3.A) and often suggests an alternative spelling after tapping the misspelled word (see Fig.3.B). The predictive feature predicts the words as participants type by suggesting two words that appear in a bar above the keyboard (see Fig.3.C).



Figure 3. The outcome of enabling the spell check feature in (A) the red underline indicating a misspelled word; (B) the suggestions of the misspelled word; and the outcome of enabling the predictive feature in (C) predicting words for “bec”.

Participants were careful to check their spelling and grammar before posting on Twitter and this is consistent with Gleason's (2016) findings. Gleason examines the practices on Twitter of teenagers in the United States who used English as their L1 and states that these teenagers concerned themselves with what she refers to as traditional dimensions of literacy, such as correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. Saudi female undergraduates also concern themselves with correct spelling and grammar of English their L2 before writing on Twitter specifically, and social media in general. Gleason mentions that Lucy, one of his participants, preferred to access the desktop version of Twitter and uses the spell-check feature to avoid spelling errors and does not mention any resources that may be found on smartphones. However, Saudi female undergraduates draw on different resources and concrete activities to check their spelling while accessing Twitter and social media on their smartphones.

Google app was used to check the spelling by selecting the letters from the keyboard or by dictating the word. Dictating the word is accomplished by tapping the microphone and voicing the word until it appears in the search bar. However, Google Translate app was used to check the spelling by writing a particular word in English and if this word was translated into Arabic this indicates that the spelling is correct, if not, the participant would write the Arabic equivalent and get the correct English spelling.

Participants checked their English grammar by drawing on Google app, COCA website, asking a friend about the accuracy of a specific sentence and searching Twitter content written by users whose L1 is English. Using the COCA website to determine the correct usage of prepositions in English was taught to participants in one of the courses they take as part of their academic studies. However, using Google app and searching Twitter content to check their English grammar before posting on social media was not taught in formal settings. This reflects the participants creative innovative ways of checking the grammar of their L2 as they were not taught to use these two resources but learned to do this informally on their own. These creative ways in checking the accuracy of their L2 grammar align with the characteristics of vernacular practices proposed by Barton and Hamilton (1998). These ways are less observable, not regulated by social organisation and are learned in non-systemic informal setting.

The strategies used to check the meaning of English are associated with smartphone apps and the COCA website. The smartphone apps are Google, Google Translate, and three different dictionary apps. These resources can be accessed via smartphone when connected to the Internet which reflect that these participants are highly skilled in technologies and incorporate these skills in their social media literacies. Using Google Translate app in checking what a word mean in English reflects the influence of their academic major studies on their everyday literacies. They were taught to use Google Translate app to assist them in translating texts from English to Arabic in one of their academic courses.

Conclusion and Implications

This study explored the material resources and concrete activities Saudi female undergraduates draw on as they read and write in English on social media. The data suggest that these material resources and concrete activities are an amalgam of resources and activities related to built-in smartphone

technologies supporting English spelling. These material resources and concrete activities are also related to smartphone apps, websites and social relations.

The findings of this study have a number of implications for language learning and the teaching of English as L2. This paper responded to the suggestion made by Barton and Potts (2013) to use the knowledge gained about language learners' practices in L2 to inform classroom decisions about the content to be taught. These female Saudi undergraduates were not aware that their approaches to checking their correct spelling, appropriate grammar and word choices are not widely used. They drew on tools built into their smartphones and asserted that they were not taught these approaches. They needed to change the default settings of their keyboards and this was not known to all participants in this study sample. Female Saudi undergraduates extended their search capabilities by using Google app, Google Translate app and the COCA website to check their spellings, grammar and word choices in ways that are not necessarily widely used by language educators and learners.

Raising awareness of these approaches and the importance of using English on social media literacies could lead to a positive effect on Saudis' learning of English as their L2, bearing in mind the widespread use of social media apps on smartphones among young people in Saudi Arabia. This could be done by encouraging language learners to use English in social media literacies to improve their English. Language educators are advised to include a section in the English language learning curriculum to inform language learners of the potential of their smartphones and include the approaches to check the accuracy of English reported in this study. Language educators are also advised to notify their language learners to activate the 'predictive' and 'check spelling' keyboard features in their smartphones.

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