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The URL of the English translation is:

## **Structured web 2.0 language learning communities: roles, pedagogy and relation to content**

*ABSTRACT.* Among the many types of online language learning collectives, this contribution<sup>1</sup> explores in particular web 2.0 communities with structured learning pathways. Our analysis is focused on a sample comprising three large communities in terms of numbers (numbers of users and languages learnt): Babel, Busuu and Livemocha. They are examined from three viewpoints (user roles, learning pathways and relation to content) with the aim of determining the technical and pedagogical structure and the communicative affordances of these collaborative learning spaces. The tensions that arise in terms of the technical dimension (web 2.0 artefact) and the pedagogical dimension (pedagogical approaches, processes and resources, tutor-learner roles) are discussed in the final section.

*KEYWORDS:* language learning, emerging technologies, web 2.0, social media, telecollaboration.

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*RÉSUMÉ.* Parmi les nombreux types de collectifs d'apprenants de langues en ligne, cette contribution explore un type particulier de collectif, les communautés web 2.0 dotées de parcours d'apprentissage. Notre analyse se penche sur un échantillon composé de trois grandes communautés en termes d'effectifs (nombre d'utilisateurs et langues apprises): Babel, Busuu et Livemocha. Elles sont examinées sous trois angles (rôles des utilisateurs, parcours pédagogiques et rapports au contenu) en vue de déterminer la structure technico-pédagogique et les affordances communicatives de ces espaces d'apprentissage collaboratif. Les tensions qui surgissent au niveau de la dimension technique (artefact web 2.0) et pédagogique (approches,

*démarches et ressources pédagogiques, rôles tuteurs-apprenants) seront abordées dans la partie finale.*

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## **1. Introduction**

In the field of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), many types of online language learning collectives benefiting from the interaction facilities offered by Internet have been created since the 1980s: tele-tandem, e-twinning, several types of collaborative projects between classes of learners (and/or tutors). These projects apply a variety of interaction and collaboration means, based on one or more digital artefacts (and their combinations). These different initiatives are finally observed and analyzed from various angles: telecollaboration practices, tools, mediation process(es), approaches, cultural, instrumental and semiotic aspects, conditions of replication, etc. In this respect, there is an abundance of CALL literature (Chappelle, 1997; Lamy & Hampel, 2007; Lund, 2003; Mangenot, 2002) to name just a few) particularly in terms of technology enhanced learning and teaching paradigms (Zourou, 2007). With some exceptions (Lomicka & Lord, 2009; Thomas, 2009; Guth & Helm, 2010; Demaizière & Zourou, 2012), to our knowledge, few works have broken new ground in respect of the specific characteristics of the evolution stemming from the appearance of web 2.0 paradigms in the CALL field.

Web 2.0 technologies, and above all their collaborative potential (in terms of ease of co-development and co-interpretation, management and valorization of the data and resources that emanate from sharing and co-construction efforts), can open up new pathways in language learning, through not only the development of tools, but also new types of tasks, the introduction of innovative interaction modes or simply using the “buzz” around the term to motivate/attract learners.

Conole & Alevizou (2010:47-53) identify ten categories of web 2.0 activities by re-combining those proposed in Crooks et al. (2008:9-15). Conole and Alevizou associate each tool with one type of activity only. Regarding social networking sites (SNS) that are of particular interest to our paper, the authors indicate, for example, that the most successful SNS are those that allow the creation of spaces in which users can invite “friends”, share messages, texts, videos, tag resources and play games (even though these encompass other activities) (p.49).

Within the framework of this communication we focus on SNS as one of the tool categories mentioned above, which include sites such as *Facebook* or *Myspace* together with the tools for creation of collective spaces (among others: *Ning*, *Elgg*). Cachia (2008:3) identifies six characteristics of SNS corresponding broadly to those of the community sites we analyse below: valorization of the user profile (entry point to these sites, via which users introduce themselves to the community); outsourcing of data (Cachia emphasizes networks of contacts, but this also involves data specific to site objectives, such as the history of contributions); the emergence of

new modes of network constitution (for example, *last.fm* puts users in contact with one another according to the similarity of their musical tastes); “bottom-up” activities (users influence the content, see also 3.2). She concludes her enumeration with two criteria that we do not examine: ease of use and reorganization of Internet geography. Through our analysis of the different language learning communities, we demonstrate that these are part of the landscape of web 2.0 technologies.

### ***1.0. Field of enquiry***

Two criteria were applied for the delimitation of the field of enquiry. Firstly, some types of web 2.0 technologies (e.g. virtual worlds) are not included: they do not have the same functional characteristics as social networking sites (they are also separated in Conole & Alevizou (2010) and Crooks (Crooks et al., 2008), and from an instrumental point of view (Rabardel, 1995) their potential for interaction is not comparable.

Secondly, only communities stating the explicit objective of language learning that is enhanced through explicit learning progression processes were selected (even if, as we see below, this objective is affected by the tensions between the different players). *Facebook* communities without substantial pedagogical support are therefore excluded (e.g. BBC and RFI Facebook communities). Even though one of the objectives of these groups is language practice, it is not part of an educational approach incorporating progressive stages of learning. Although in certain cases activities may be proposed by teachers for their “real life” learners (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Arnold & Paulus, 2010), the underlying teaching approach and resources are only accessible to a restricted sub-group of users previously formed (*i.e.* the teacher’s class).

There are several types of language learning spaces supported by web 2.0 applications. In one of our first studies (Loiseau et al., 2010), we proposed a schematic typology in three categories: structured language learning communities (or communities containing learning pathways), marketplaces and language exchange sites. In this provisional typology, the first category, structured language learning communities, embraces communities such as [LiveMocha](#), [Busuu](#) and [Babbel](#) where learning materials are accompanied by more or less structured learning pathways. The second category, marketplaces, refers to communities in which learners can look for language tutors online and language tutors can offer their services for a fee (examples are [Italki](#) and [Palabea](#)<sup>1</sup>). It is worth noting that in 2011 Livemocha has slowly started moving in that direction. Yet at the time of writing of this article this functionality was not fully implemented. Additionally, the issues raised in sections 3.1. to 3.3. of this article have not been addressed. In the third category, language exchange sites, users meet for language socialization purposes in loose ways without being supported by any language learning materials (e.g. [Lingofriends](#) and [Polyglot Club](#)). This paper focuses on the first category of language learning spaces, structured language learning communities, through the analysis of the three most powerful communities to date.

### ***1.1. Methodology***

Our methodological approach is based on three analysis criteria: user roles, pedagogical models and horizontality. They are proposed as a starting point for establishing a battery of methodological tools called upon to evolve with the analysis of the different communities and the practices that emerge within them. Since this is an exploratory approach, the proposed criteria are not complete and must be understood as an attempt to offer methodological pathways capable of grasping the originality of these communities and of emphasizing the analytical process resulting from this originality: the fact that they are part of the “web 2.0” paradigm for which appropriate methodological tools are still under the development. Before launching a field analysis on a larger scale, our criteria need to be tested on a small number of communities, not only to see whether they are functional, but also with the aim of extending them in the light of any questions that may arise.

After analyzing the roles of users for each of the communities in our study and how they pertain to learning (section 3.1.), we examine two other criteria. One considers the educational dimension underlying the courses, whose modelling we describe in detail, while the other focuses on a core notion of web 2.0, user generated content (UGC).

## 2. Web 2.0 language learning communities: a brief overview

An initial attempt to list web 2.0 language learning communities and to identify their specific interactional characteristics was performed upstream, as part of a broader study (Dixhoorn & al., 2010). This preliminary work aimed at identifying the way in which designers of resources use web 2.0 to facilitate and reinforce language learning or their position as players in the field. It mainly aimed to obtain the point of view of resource designers in respect of the changes accompanying the advent of the expression “web 2.0”. Some of the information was collected by semi-structured interviews. This preliminary piece of research allowed us to perform a first exploration of the educational potential of these collectives, despite the fact that web 2.0 as a conceptual-ideological and even technical construction is far from being defined and shared unanimously (see Dilger, 2010) and for education (Anderson, 2007; Goodfellow & Lamy, 2010).

In the current paper, it is important to remember that we focus on *structured* language learning communities: those that contain learning pathways, excluding the other two types of community (marketplaces and language exchange sites). This leads us to definition of our scope of analysis, comprising three web 2.0 language learning communities offering some of the most comprehensive learning pathways: *Babbel*, *Busuu* and *Livemocha*. This choice is determined by their impact in terms of numbers of members and languages learnt<sup>2</sup>. For each site we first analyzed the offer that we felt was the most representative of the community. Since *Babbel* ended up becoming a paid site, we joined in order to test it. *Busuu* and *Livemocha*, on the other hand, operate on a “free” economic model combining *freemium* and advertising (for a concise description of each of these models, see <http://bit.ly/Guillaud>). In these models, profitability is derived above all from the free aspect: *freemium* requires a basic offer accessible to anyone, leading certain users to subscribe to a more complete paid offer (Dilger, 2010), while the advertising model obviously depends on site traffic (Wauthy, 2008). We focused on the free offers of these two players.

### 2.0. Fundamental features

Before moving on to the criteria themselves, it is important to explain the overall operation of the sites. One of their common denominators is that they enable the user to play the role of both learner and tutor. Each community has its own conception of

learning pathways, its sense of language didactics and distance learning pedagogy, which are derived above all from the framework in which it is developing. The conditions of interaction and the type of interaction tools vary from one platform to another, but the same basic building bricks can be seen: – lessons (or presentation of notions to be acquired); – structural exercises or exercises based on the lesson model, which are corrected automatically; – written and oral production exercises, corrected by users (those who agree to take on the role of tutor); – synchronous or asynchronous interaction with other users (tutors) within the framework of the learning sequence, using the communication tools provided by the platform.

For O'Reilly and his team (Musser et al., 2007) the network effect is a key feature of web 2.0. According to their definition, “Web 2.0 is (...) a more mature, distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network effects” (p.4). It is mainly expressed in these language learning communities via the facility for learners to obtain one (and sometimes several) personalized corrections of each exercise submitted, which represents one of the key advantages of this type of platform. These corrections are made by users who have generally joined the platform to *learn* languages. The question that then arises is to determine how they are encouraged to take on the role of tutor. This question takes us straight to our first criterion, the analysis of the role of users in the three communities identified.

### **3. Analysis of communities**

Below we examine the three communities, *Babbel*, *Busuu* and *Livemocha*, according to the three criteria predefined: user roles, pedagogical models and degree of horizontality.

#### ***3.0. First criterion: the role of users***

The first analysis criterion we have selected is that of user status, i.e. whether or not users are obliged to take on a tutoring role.

*Babbel*, which applies the least constraints in this respect, does not oblige its users to assume a tutoring function in any way. Certainly, *Babbel* proposes that its members divide themselves into sub-communities of co-learners (organized by L1-L2 pairs) and tandem partners (tandem learning, Lewis & Stickler, 2007) with the aim of putting their

knowledge into practice, helping one another, finding solutions to their problems and socializing their learning activities. However, participation in these sub-communities is at the user's discretion: it is not promoted, and conversely non-participation is not penalized. The only criterion taken into account to assess the activity of users is their learning path, i.e. their work using *Babbel* content. Where availability, mutual aid and correcting other learners' output are concerned – in other words, when it comes to community spirit –, this is left to the discretion of the *Babbel* user.

In the case of *Busuu* the situation is significantly different: it is the services provided to the community (and not the learning activity) which, without being compulsory, are valorized and rewarded by a *berry* points system: the more services you give to the community, the more *berries* are collected and automatically displayed on your profile. The implicit result of this operation is that the most “important” members of the community, or those perceived as such, are the users whose profile shows the most *berries*. The services giving access to *berries* include: provision of feedback on production exercises, building a network of friends, creating a theme-based group and moderating an active group, translating pages of *Busuu.com*, and suggesting ideas for improving the site.

*Livemocha* is quite similar to *Busuu*: users collect *mochapoints* according to their learning activities and every time they lend a helping hand to the community. *Livemocha* also keeps a record of a “teacher's score” (proportion of *mochapoints* collected by the user by taking on the role of tutor). A particular feature of this type of point is to give entitlement to rights, such as access to all courses in all languages (otherwise charged for), or to become a site translator (another way of earning *mochapoints*). In addition, the invitation to help one another and to be responsible members of the community, mainly by correcting the submissions of other members, is more explicit with *Livemocha*, in its description of the tutoring function<sup>1</sup>:

“By rating and correcting another community member's submission, you are ensuring a productive learning environment for you and other community members. Below are submissions by community members trying to learn your language. Select an exercise type and click on their submission title to correct and rate a writing or speaking exercise”.

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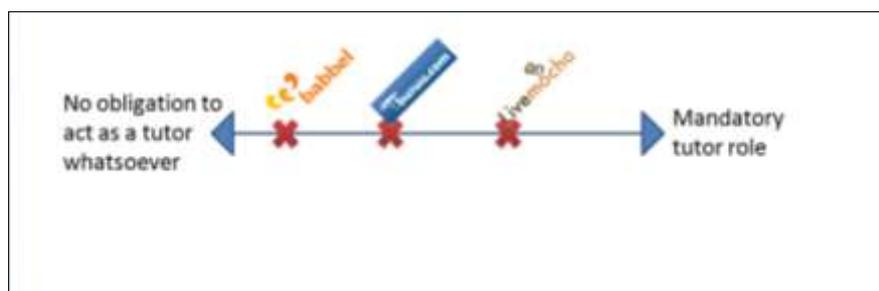
<sup>1</sup> <http://fr-fr.livemocha.com/tutor/language/index>

As stated above, the possibility for a user to see his/her submissions with comments by other users is one of the central components of these learning communities. However, this specific feature is exploited in different ways by the designers of the three communities. *Livemocha* is the one that seeks to take advantage most explicitly of this characteristic to boost the network effect and construct – according to Clint Schmidt, then *Livemocha*'s marketing vice-president in an interview he gave for the purpose of our research (Dixhoorn et al., 2010) – “virtuous circles”: the use of points (similar to *Busuu*'s, but with the possibility to access otherwise paid resources) to qualify users is meant to have an influence on the correction of other users' productions. Since correction is a meticulous task, they will not necessarily correct a large number of submissions. The designers anticipate that these corrections will focus in particular on the tutor's network of contacts and the most “deserving” users. In other words, a user who never corrects other users' submissions will have this inactivity recorded in his or her profile and runs the risk of eventually becoming isolated, while the other members – potential correctors – then choose to favour the correction of submissions by their contacts and those who play an active part in the life of the community.

To return to the criteria of Cachia (Cachia, 2008), this first analysis demonstrates the use of the profile as an interface for presentation to the community (points). It also allows us to address the modes of constitution of a network specific to this type of community, particularly evident in *Livemocha*, where to encourage this “virtuous circle”, L2 learners are invited to change role after each activity, by taking the role of L1 tutor. They also have the option of asking other users, initially among their contacts, to correct their submissions. In our experience, the vast majority of these contacts seem to be cases of users “met” by correcting each other productions

Lastly, the “merit” of *Livemocha* teachers is not solely quantitative, since all feedback from a teacher is assessed in qualitative terms by members of the community (grades). This highlights an apparent problem: learning is only supervised by learners taking on the role of tutor. The quality of feedback is necessarily a problem that the communities will have to face, whether to satisfy the current formula or to undertake a form of professionalization of the teaching aspect. Such process was in progress at the time of writing the French version of the article and is, at the time of publication of this one, fully operational in *Livemocha*.

In light of the analysis of the first criterion, the three communities can be displayed schematically in the following axis:



**Figure 1** – Representation of three communities on an axis according to the *user roles* criterion

### 3.1. Second criterion: pedagogical models

The pedagogical models of the three communities have been discussed in a recent paper (Potolia et al., 2011). Here we attempt to compare the pedagogical approaches developed by the communities and display them graphically on an axis.

Users are not the only upholders of the pedagogical models applicable in the community: the learning materials used are the work of the community managers in cooperation with large content providers (e.g. *Busuu* partnering with Collins, Pons, MacMillan and The Guardian and *Livemocha* partnering with Pearson and Collins). In respect of this criterion, we need to go beyond the strict *modus operandi* and focus on the way in which the different players conceive access to linguistic knowledge. The pedagogical models are examined from the point of view of the coherence of the courses offered and the learning principles governing them.

In the case of *Babbel*, at first sight there is no progression in the usual sense of the term. The content is structured according to different grammatical, situational or lexical categories, or else by competences and needs (usefulness, rapidity, repetition):

- Themes and situations
- Express training
- Refresher course
- Listen and practise
- Writing exercises
- Grammar
- Basic and advanced vocabulary
- 1000 useful sentences

Guided only by the resources available and their organisation, users are in control of their own learning. The site is therefore based on the principle that distance learners have the necessary skills to define their needs, assess the gaps in their knowledge and construct their own learning pathways. This representation of users changes within the framework of courses for beginners. *Babbel* opts in this case for a functional structuring (by speech acts) of content, similar to printed language manuals:



### Ciao, come stai? Part 1

Here you'll learn: - greetings and farewells formal and informal - short sentences for introductory conversations - to ask how others are doing - to say how you're doing



### Ciao, come stai? Part 2

Here you'll learn: - personal pronouns I, you, ... - the verb *essere* = to be - to say where you are from - to ask where others are from



### Ciao, come stai? Review

Here you'll review: - the vocabulary from the previous two lessons - using formal and informal terms of address - the forms of the verb *essere*



### Dove abiti? Part 1

Here you'll learn: - a regular verb ending in -are: *abitare* = to live - to say which city you live in - to say where you are from

Figure 2 - Functional structuring of resources in *Babbel*<sup>3</sup>

Another element in terms of content architecture – a trace of the progressive adaptation of community designers to the real or perceived needs of their members – deserves a mention. Since December 2010, *Babbel* has offered a new distribution of its teaching modules by quarter. The content is not new, but has been redistributed over the year (in quarterly modules) with the aim of supporting users through their learning stages:



Figure 3 - Distribution of modules by quarter in *Babbel*

Through the structuring of all its content, *Babbel* is apparently aiming at an audience with profiles and needs differentiated according to the principles governing autonomous learning situations. However, the units, lessons or courses proposed are in fact *phrasebooks*: the lesson is a set of phrases (or words) consolidated according to one criterion (theme, grammar, etc.). Here the repetition of phrases or words out of context, their translation into L1 and their spelling supplant current trends in language learning pedagogies.

The same applies to *Livemocha* where the only principle applied is that of *phrasebooks* associated with grammatical points or themes. They appear to be aiming towards acquisition of certain skills (example: in the beginners' English course (unit 104), it is stated that on completion of the unit, students will be "able to introduce themselves and understand simple instructions") but there is nothing in the methodology applied to

enable them to achieve this. The choice of *phrasebooks* as the sole source of learning “prevents” the use of authentic documents and even texts or dialogues as documents to trigger understanding, grammatical practice, or contextualization of the functional and notional dimensions of the language studied. The structural exercises then take over, reflecting a behaviourist approach to foreign languages.

It can also be noted that a significant gap develops between the understanding (*phrasebook*) and production sections. While in terms of *input* users are limited to exposure to words or phrases, in terms of *output*, more complex (written) discursive/textual submissions are expected (example: “Describe the weather for five days and explain what different people need for that weather.”<sup>4</sup>). This is also the case with *Babbel*.

However, in our view *Livemocha*'s most serious failing arises from its determination to offer a large number of languages to be learnt (35). For these languages progression is based on the specific morphological characteristics of English. The teaching content of the other 34 languages then consists simply of translations of the lessons provided for English. This has major repercussions (for example, in English words do not have a gender, in Russian you learn to say “she is old” – она старая – but not “he is old” – он старый). The “remixing” of data advocated by Musser et al. (2007:24) cannot be applied blindly, at the risk of running counter to good teaching sense.

From a macro-structural point of view, the organisation and theoretically rational distribution of learning content in courses, units and finally lessons suffer from certain failings. In effect, the courses are designated by a rather obscure code (e.g. “English 102”, “English 202”, etc.). Although this code is followed by a short explanation of the intended audience, we feel that this laudable aim is not however achieved.

As for the lessons, these are not constructed on the basis of identically formulated objectives and therefore alternate between aims that are grammatical (“Unit 9, Lesson 2: Regular verbs in the present continuous/simple past”), lexical (“Unit 4, Lesson 1: Numbers”) or lexical/communicative (“Unit 4, Lesson 5: Instructions”).

*Busuu* is the only one of the three sites studied to make reference to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* and to organise its content accordingly (from A1 to B2).



Figure 4 - Two different representations of progression in *Busuu*

For each level the user can choose access to knowledge by course, by catalogue, or by grammatical theme. “Course” progression is the most linear, similar to *Babbel*’s quarterly courses. The user can view all the stages to be accomplished in the form of a pathway and complete them to achieve the level chosen (Figure 4, left). The “catalogue” pathway, which is freer in form, is based on the principle that users are capable of identifying the gaps in their knowledge, and their needs, and constructing their own progression based on indications of level, vocabulary and theme (Figure ). Lastly, the “grammar” path is part of the *Premium* version of *Busuu*.

In addition, *Busuu* is the only site which does not use a *phrasebook* approach. We are still in an approach that is culturally poor, and inferior to certain language learning materials distributed on “traditional” media. However, unlike *Livemocha* and *Babbel*, *Busuu* introduces dialogue into learning as a vehicle for understanding and input which is more complex and multi-level than the *phrasebook* formula, which still exists here but becomes part of a stage situated upstream of the dialogue, fulfilling a function of preparation for reception and appropriation of the dialogue content.

At the end of the study of the pedagogical models implemented in the three communities - which we must emphasize focuses on the materials and not on the learner’s overall activity in the context of these sites - we feel that *Busuu* offers the content that is the most consistent with current language learning approaches. However the *Busuu* teaching environment is still not ideal in terms of teaching consistency, though it is the least influenced by the representation of language learning as a list of words and structures to be memorized.



Figure 5 Representation of three communities on an axis according to the *pedagogical models* criterion

### 3.2. Third criterion: horizontality

In this last criterion tested, the dimension of uses, at least as prescribed, is discussed from the viewpoint of one of the central features of the web 2.0 concept, which could be called horizontality. It relates to the “bottom-up” activities referred to by Cachia (Cachia, 2008) or User Generated Content, whose importance as a concept can be demonstrated by its pivotal position in the definition of social media by Haenlein and Kaplan (2010:61): as (...) "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content".

The first task in terms of describing the horizontality of a site is to define its content types. We have separated the content into three categories (which could be positioned along an axis): main content, annex content and traces.

The main content is that which is at the heart of the platform, around which the users’ learning interactions gravitate. Here we consider that this content consists of the teaching materials as they are integrated into learning progression. In the interviews we conducted with representatives of *Busuu* and *Livemocha* (Dixhoorn et al., 2010), this was the sense that the designers implicitly gave to this term.

Out of the community sites analyzed, only *Livemocha* enables users to have a direct impact on content. However, users cannot actually add any content: the content that they provide is only the translation of English materials (with the consequences pointed out in section 0). In effect, users who have acquired a status allowing them to do so can suggest translations of site interfaces or of learning resources for their L1. In the latter case this will be content as such, though not in the former. A certain number of courses for more or less “rare” languages have been created in this way, in other words through the translation of chunks of predefined text from English to other languages (cf. section 0). The contributors are named. However, we cannot use the term UGC in the same sense as

in Wikipedia, for example, where users decide freely on the information and on the structure of the articles they contribute.

The “annex” content is not necessarily “annex” from the point of view of its importance to the different users. However it is so in the sense that it is not integrated into the main content or learning pathways. This is the case, for example, with *Livemocha flashcards* (lexical revision exercise in which a learner is asked a set of questions repeatedly until all of them have been answered (or a predefined time has elapsed), which are designed for incentive-free use by learners, who will not earn *mochapoints* by practising with them, although they will earn some for creating them. But the lessons do not link to these cards. In the same way, *Busuu* groups present persistent data, especially on cultural issues, but there is no further integration of this data in learning sequences and very little possibility of structuring the content. Traditional forums are used as a more organized (and therefore more likely to be reused) source of data than the *Babbel* “board”, which stores users’ cultural, linguistic or practical exchanges.

Traces, lastly, are persistent data that may be accessible to all, such as corrections of exercises submitted, or only to their authors, such as errors made in *Busuu* exercises which are kept and may be used as a source for automatic generation of exercises (users may specify whether an exercise should consist only of their "mistakes" and “marked vocabulary" or whether it should be a "random test"). This is not content because the traces are not designed to be a source of information for the community (which would be different, for example, with a notation system for the interactions that a correction of an exercise can trigger and that could have been used as examples of correction directly linked to the exercise) Since we do not have access to the same data as the community administrators, we have to content ourselves with a generic definition of the term “trace”, closer to the etymological sense than that of traces engineering (Laflaquière et al., 2007). Our definition, however, is in line with our observer status and allows us to consider both "traces left by an action" (corrections on submissions), and the traces used to adapt the environment to the users (*Busuu* exercises<sup>2</sup>).

Lastly we do not consider the case of synchronous exchanges (non-persistent data).

Following these observations, we propose to describe horizontality as a continuum of the degree of exploitation of data generated by users on the site, along the lines of the

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<sup>2</sup> Which qualifies the *trace engineering* sense of the term.

description of a site as “being web 2.0” (Bonderup Dohn, 2009). As we do not have information on traffic statistics, we base this scale on the different types of content we have defined. In our opinion, UGC concerns first and foremost the main content of the site. Although from the point of view of usage the additional content could turn out to be used more than the main content, this does not appear to be the case. In addition, from a conceptual point of view, the main content is central to the design of a site, and as long as the annex content is not reassessed and its data better integrated and structured, it cannot, in our view, govern the degree of horizontality. This scale enables us to treat, via the same criterion, content in the strictest sense and the least strict sense, therefore taking the variety of uses into account.

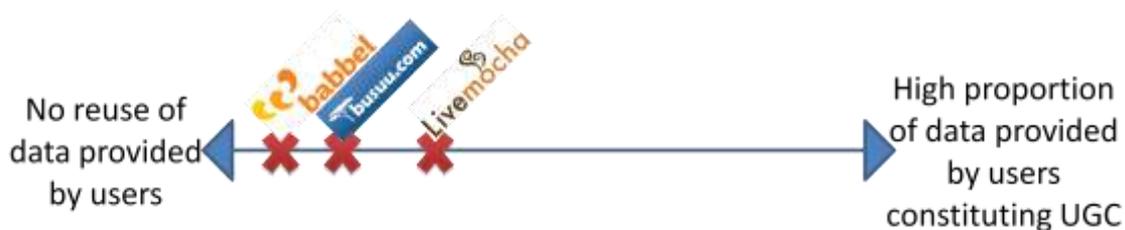


Figure 6 - Representation of three communities on an axis according to the *horizontality* criterion

In this way, *Livemocha*, although not very horizontal in its design (we cannot really speak of UGC), is the only one of the communities visited where user contributions can affect the main content. The three communities all have some form of annex content that is pedagogical or usable for learning, so we cannot really separate them in this respect. However, only Busuu seems to use the traces to offer the user more appropriate content, hence its position ahead of Babbel in Figure 6.

#### 4. Comments/conclusion

The three criteria proposed here are examined separately. Although we feel that they are relevant analysis tools, they raise many questions.

For example, they forced us to discuss content via a filter, making it possible to dissociate the main site content from the annex content. In addition, the quality of corrections and other contributions, together with the systems of assessment by points, give rise to the question of professionalization of tutors. In this precise case is the quality of being a native speaker sufficient, especially when the main content is not supported by any metalinguistic explanation (see section 0)? Can the number of native speakers compensate for the lack of expertise in terms of teaching professionals? Or is it more important to adopt a certification approach? *Livemocha*, which already implements a scoring system in the access to functions and in access to advanced user rights, has created a status of tutor co-opted by the platform, which enables the best-assessed and most active teachers (possibly subject to conditions on experience outside the site)

to access courses for free, or even to be paid for their contributions. This feature was launched over 2011 and seems to be an evolution of *Livemocha* towards a *marketplace* type of community. Since it took place after this article was written, we lack the hindsight to properly analyze the consequences of such modification here.

Lastly, it is the combination of several criteria which gives rise to the most interesting questions from the research point of view. We observed that in the case of *Livemocha*, the greatest re-use of resources took place to the detriment of an original pedagogical approach. However we are entitled to make the assumption that this influence is not systematic. We can imagine an example of true UGC which would allow users to diversify the wording of exercises or to restructure and enrich courses, and which could therefore, under certain conditions, benefit the pedagogical approach of the content.

Studying these criteria in relation to one another, for example in terms of relative importance at the time of developments or in terms of their influence on one another, could lead to the design of complete analytical tools. These would help not only in the categorization of platforms, but also by making it possible to suggest ways in which to use web 2.0 tools for language teaching, or to design models in which the technical aspects would be fully at the service of innovative pedagogical approaches supported by web 2.0 tools.

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<sup>1</sup> Except some minor changes, this paper appeared initially in French (Loiseau et al., 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Figures updated in January 2012. *Babbel*: 3 million users on its site and seven languages proposed (EN, FR, DE, IT, ES, PT, SV). *Busuu*: 10 million users and 7 languages on offer (EN, FR, DE, IT, ES, PT, RU). *Livemocha*: 11 million users (from 200 countries), 35 languages taught (with some (very) rare languages including Arabic, Catalan, Esperanto, Greek, Estonian, etc.).

<sup>3</sup> The figures sometimes combine several different screen entry sections, in order to reduce the space used.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.livemocha.com/exercises/view/447>