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Blogs for specific purposes: Expressivist or socio-cognitivist approach?

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Abstract

This paper represents an earnest attempt to identify specific pedagogical roles for blogs in language learning. After briefly describing various types of blogs and defining their purposes (Herring *et al.,* 2005) we attempt to accommodate their position and application within language teaching (Thorne & Scott Payne, 2005), relating evidence from teachers' blogs (Edublog.org) and also within Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories. In particular, we shall be concentrating on the process and post-process writing approaches (Matsuda, 2003), with particular emphasis on current cognitivist (Atkinson, 2003; Ferris & Hodgcock, 1998) and expressivist (Berlin, 1988) theories. These approaches will be discussed in terms of their effectiveness when establishing specific blog writing tasks. Whilst some researchers have advocated for a 'lead blog' or template for other students to follow (Stone, 2004), we have been seeking an eclectic approach based on the three approaches mentioned above. We shall describe our own blended task methodology (Abermann, 2004; Thorne, 2003) wherein language students at a Third Level Institution were set a blog writing task initially over a complete semester (12 weeks). The blog exercise employed both an early expressivist approach and later a (socio-) cognitivist one. Our findings, with examples from students' blogs (and also from students who continued their blogs over a 6 month period), will be presented as well as our recommendations for the integration of blogs into L2 virtual writing environments.

Keywords: blog writing, LSP, expressivism, socio-cognitivism

1 Introducing blogs

1.1 Defining blogs

Over the last number of years, the phenomenon of blog writing and the subsequent emergence of the blogosphere have presented web users with yet another means of communicating in the online environment. In fact, the emergence of blogs is indicative of the rise and growth of social writing platforms such as: wikis, bebo.com, myspace.com and writely.com which currently facilitate a more collaborative approach

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to writing on the web (Alexander, 2006). The term blogs has been in circulation since 1997 when enthusiast Jorn Barger decided to rename his website, Robot Wisdom, as a 'weblog', soon afterwards abbreviated to 'blog'. Consequently, terms such as 'blogger', 'to blog' and 'blogosphere' have became part of the vocabulary employed by users whose diverse writings have contributed to establishing a dynamic and ever-expanding network. For the past ten years or so, the weblog community has grown in number to the figure of at least 10 million active blogs in 2005 (Bialik, 2005; Safri, 2005) to more than 70 million in April 2007, with 120,000 new blogs being created every day (Guardian Online, 2007) – an expanding phenomenon which has been aided in particular by the availability of free blogging software such as blogger.com and audblog.com. Generally, blogs are regarded as 'websites consisting of dated entries typically listed in reverse chronological order on a single page' (Kolari *et al*., 2006:92). They are, by and large, topic-oriented and adopt a wide variety of forms such as: free-flowing notebooks of ideas; platforms for presenting alternative viewpoints; diary entries or simply links to the unclassifiable (Blood, 2000). Hence, blog content is typically diverse in nature and covers a wide variety of multi-faceted topics: from single-themed entries to multiple genres with miscellaneous subject matter. Examples of the former include: 'lifelogs'; classiclogs'; 'furylogs'; 'warblogs' and 'rhetologs' (Ford, 2000). One pertinent observation suggests that blogs offer refuge and sanctuary from the chaotic world of the web and encourage users to reflect more on their activities:

> We are being pummelled by a deluge of data and unless we create time and spaces in which to reflect, we will be left with only our reactions (Blood, 2000).

Thus, the unavoidable sense of information overload which we frequently experience on the web is somewhat counterbalanced by the possibility of creating our own contemplative space which facilitates more consideration and reflection on our actions. Blood (*ibid*) also notes the inevitable shift in status of the individual from 'consumer' to 'creator', thus undermining the type of information control exerted by authorities over artists in the past. Therefore, it is significant to acknowledge the relative empowering nature of blogs which allows individuals to express freely their ideas and to publish them on a worldwide stage (Huffaker, 2005:92).

However, these observations do not address the various degrees of sophistication currently associated with blogs and the diverse range of design and delivery formats which they may now adopt. Due to the inherent generic format of this writing tool, it is difficult to pinpoint a stable and succinct definition of a blog. Moreover, as one attempts to define a blog, one is immediately struck by the amorphous nature of the expanding blogosphere. Blogs are currently multi-use in format and thus have evolved beyond the original perception as being mere journal entries.

Due to the fact that this generic tool can be customised in terms of both its presentation and content, the main difficulty lies in seeking and/or creating accurate categories which may enhance our understanding of the blog's purpose, role and bonus for the online user, and in our case for the online language learner. One helpful definition of current blog applications is provided by Wikipedia. Here blogs are labelled according to particular categories which include:

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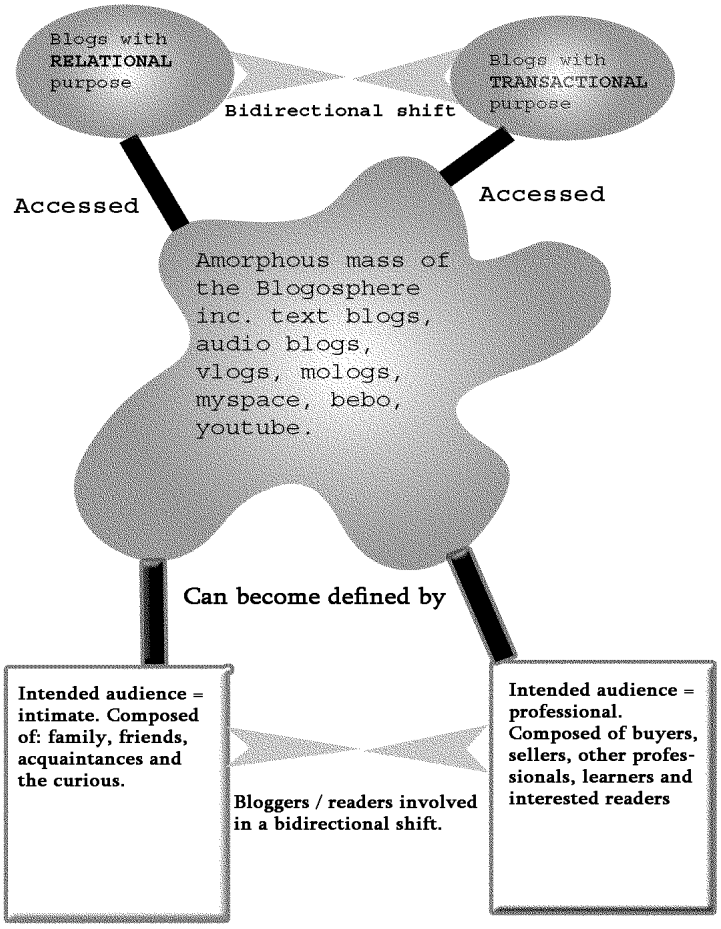


Fig 1. Non-hierarchical connections in the Blogosphere

- Media type: e.g. video, text, photo blogs
- Device: Defined by the particular device used to write the blog. For example, 'mologs' are blogs written by mobile devices such as PDAs or mobile phones
- Genre : blogs which focus on a particular genre or subject, e.g. Wikipedia.

Thus, different types of blog content are constantly emerging and evolving from both public and private sources which in turn blur any fixed or universal description of 'the blog'. Figure 1 represents our attempt to display the non-hierarchical connections which exist around the amorphous mass of the blogosphere. We wish to emphasise the close and changing relationships between the four aspects of both blog writing and production, beginning with purpose. Blogs may have a relational and/or transactional purpose (Koester, 2006) with various intended audiences which can be defined by what we may presume are their intended audiences, be they intimate and/or professional.

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2 Blogs for language learning purposes

Blogs are typically individualistic or collaborative in nature (Murray & Hourigan, 2006:158) and, provided that an appropriate task is implemented by the teacher, can offer a unique platform for the language learner to discuss and reflect in the target language. In fact, the flexibility of this tool allows the potential for a diverse range of tasks to be designed and developed by the language teacher. For example, within this distinct learning context blogs can be exploited for group work (Jeanneau & Batardière, 2006; Bloch, 2007:131) or can be maintained as reflective journals (Wagner, 2003) by learners outside of the classroom environment as part of their independent learning strategies. In addition to textual blogs, the exploitation of multilingual multimedia blogs such as videos and podcasts as source material is also potentially useful for improving reading and listening skills in the target language. On a more practical point, blogs are perceived to be helpful as language tools for the following reasons:

- They are quite easy to set up
- The software is readily accessible and free of charge
- Blog hosting sites are multilingual – for example blogger.com is available in ten different languages
- The content is instantly publishable on the web
- Interaction and commentary from the teacher and fellow class members are facilitated by the 'comment' function
- Learners can develop a wide range of generic transferable skills
- Target language ("Authentic") blogs exist which may provide content for discourse analyses.

Thus, the relative efficiency synonymous with the blog creation process allows the teacher to dedicate more time to designing and implementing appropriate blog tasks which match the needs of the language class. In addition, the multilingual functionality of blog hosting sites facilitates more accurate written expression by the learners in the target language. Furthermore, while the task is predominantly focused on language learning, students are also developing and refining their general ICT skills which can be applied to other aspects of their studies. These include improving areas such as search strategies, page layout and design, as well as gaining experience uploading other forms of digital content such as pictures, video and audio data. In addition, blogs are typically perceived to be beneficial in helping to promote critical thinking skills (Oravec, 2002) as well as encouraging interactivity between learners (Ferdig & Trammell, 2004). Whilst not within the strict scope of this article, 'authentic' blogs may also offer content for the exploration of the various nuances, registers and genres that exist within blog writing in the target language.

Teachers wishing to integrate blogs into a particular language task need to consider first of all a number of salient points before they decide to introduce this tool into the specific learning environment. As blogs are examples of non-dedicated CALLware, the question of task creation and design lies firmly in the hands of the teacher. Undoubtedly, this involves a certain degree of background research by the teacher in order to familiarise oneself with current practice in the field of blogs and education. One possibility would be to consult

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informative blogs which discuss the appropriate integration of this tool into the classroom. A good example would be edublog.org which comprises blog content of a specific educational nature. Teachers can create their own blogs themselves or indeed, can search the existing blog content to locate a topic of interest.

Certainly, a great deal of flexibility and time must be invested in order to establish successfully a broad range of suitable tasks for one's students. For instance, if one wishes to use blog content as material for reading or listening in the classroom then the question of blog evaluation arises. Basically, this would require that the teacher assess the language content and level of the generic blog and devise an appropriate set of questions and tasks to be completed by the students. In relation to implementing a blog creation task, factors such as accommodating the learner's language level as well as implementing an appropriate assessment scheme for the blog are all important issues to consider. For example, students at earlier stages of their learning may not yet have acquired the appropriate linguistic skills to write in the target language. In this type of situation, writing the blog in one's native language may prove to be beneficial and worthwhile for the student. Regarding assessment, one may decide to offer specific percentages for content (in either the native or target language) as well as for the design, delivery and collaboration as part of the overall assessment.

The next section of this paper will develop and expand on the issues relating specifically to written blog content as opposed to audio and/or visual blogs. Two assessment procedures for both collaborative and individualistic blogs will be proposed as potential frameworks for monitoring and assessing written blog content. We will also underline a number of factors relative to both expressivist and sociocognitivist approaches and their implications for the particular blog task adopted by the learner.

3 Towards a framework for blog assessment: process or post-process approach?

Research in the area of written language production in both L1 and L2 has witnessed a major shift in the areas of examination and approach over the last 25 years. While initially studies may have focused predominantly on examining the final written output produced by the student, the present approach favoured by practitioners examines the actual process, and indeed post-process of the writing procedure itself, with particular attention being paid to the challenge and complexity of the exercise. However, this does not imply that the product approach has been completely shunned by educators. In fact, for some it remains a helpful process for evaluating written work (Ferris & Hodgcock, 1998). While the 'product approach' was widely used in written language education from the 1960s to the 1980s (Kroll, 1991), a subsequent wave of criticism by researchers resulted in educators adopting the process model during the 1980s. To all intents and purposes, this evaluation framework places more emphasis on fostering a greater sense of awareness of the various strategies used to produce the final product (Braddock *et al*., 1963; Pennington & Brock, 1992; Phinney, 1989; Raimes, 1983).

The various features of the process approach are particularly relevant to learners working with CALLware and are highly applicable to particular forms of blog writing production. Let us firstly consider a number of these highly flexible features synonymous with this approach. According to Carpenter and Slater (2000:7), this distinct writing style reflects a process in which:

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> producing an effective text is viewed as a complex series of inter-related tasks which include: drafting, generating ideas, structuring, focusing, micro and macro editing and the re-drafting of work. These tasks do not follow a linear progression but are applied at any stage in the process to produce a more effective piece of writing.

Thus, the inherent adaptability of this approach maximises its potential applicability to different types of writing tasks. We can identify two alternative applications within this context – the expressivist and the cognitivist- which are located within the process approach. Expressivism promotes and encourages a sense of fluency in the written output and supports the development of the writer's distinctive 'creative voice'. This is regarded as a necessary means to develop and refine one's writing skills, placing the emphasis on aspects such as self-exploration and discovery (Berlin, 1988:484). Indeed, such phenomena are already happening within the blogosphere, as evidenced from a recent survey:

> Blogs are as individual as the people who keep them. However, most bloggers are primarily interested in *creative, personal expression* – documenting individual experiences, sharing practical knowledge, or just keeping in touch with friends and family [our italics] (Lenhart & Fox, 2006).

On the other hand, the cognitivist framework reflects a more problem-solving approach and highlights the importance of developing higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills. This may be quite effective in the establishment of collaborative group tasks among learners. Various stages of the writing process are also underlined in this particular school of thought, such as planning, contextualising and pinpointing problematic rhetorical issues (Ferris & Hodgcock, 1998). Moving on to briefly discuss the post–process approach (Atkinson, 2003; Kent, 1999), we see this procedure not as a rejection of the process framework but primarily as an extension of this paradigm. Within this specific context more emphasis is placed on receiving effective and critical feedback from the teacher, for example in the form of written commentaries (Goldstein, 2004). Examples of this within a CALL context may include the comment function in MS Word or indeed, using email or conferencing tools to provide the learner with helpful comments and feedback. The latter was employed in our own situation with students at the end of the blogwriting process.

The question of collaboration is another key consideration when deliberating on which procedure to adopt. Indeed, a collaborative approach must be established in both processes, the main difference being that the participant relationships must be predefined. For example, in an individualistic 'expressivist' blog, it would be necessary to create a relationship between the student writing the blog and the teacher who monitors and assesses the work. In contrast, if the blog task required a group activity the collaborative relationship could be expanded to include fellow learners in the process, thus nurturing a sense of co-ownership and joint responsibility in the creation of the writing product. As such, this socio-cognitivist approach may encourage learners to work together and thus highlight the plurality of voices present in such a fluid, virtual environment (Mishan, 2004). This phenomenon is referred to by Ede and Lunsford

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Table 1 *Summary of approaches*

Process and Post-Process Approach	
Socio-cognitivist	Expressivist
Collective dissemination of knowledge	The 'author's voice'
Peer discussion	Creative
Collaborative processing and application of data	Reflective
Single publication comprising plurality of authors	Vanity-publishing factor
	Collaboration between student and teacher

(1990) as the 'singular text/plural authors' approach, and applied in our context it would stress the adaptability of blogs to involve the learners actively in negotiating the complex processes associated with the writing task. For a summary of these possible approaches, please refer to Table 1.

Thus, keeping in mind the approaches outlined in this section, the responsibility now lies with the teacher to choose the procedure which is most appropriate for their students. If one wishes to introduce one of these approaches into an already existing module or course, it is essential to ensure that the task conforms to any pre-existing aims and objectives of the programme. In addition, it is important to define the role of the teacher during the task and to outline to students whether feedback will be provided throughout the process or at the end of the task. For example, in the context of our study, an expressivist approach to blog writing was adopted and integrated into a Language and Technology module. As the course ethos focuses on helping learners to personalise and adapt CALLware to their particular needs, this reflective task was deemed more appropriate within the context of this particular study in order to give learners the required space to consider their various learning strategies. Feedback and correction were subsequently provided using a post-process approach. As the content was based on the students' own experiences, frequent intervention by the teacher would not have been helpful in this type of task. We will discuss this further in the following section of this paper which outlines the methodology used in the implementation of this study.

4 Methodology

4.1 Student profile

The participants in this study were enrolled on a second year Language and Technology course at the third level institution where this research was undertaken. In brief, the main objective of this module is to 'introduce students to the major pedagogical, professional and research applications of technology in modern languages and to enable

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students to integrate these into their studies' (http://www.ul.ie/~appliedlanguages/LI4113_Course_Outline.htm). Examples of CALLware evaluated by the students over the course of this programme include: generic and dedicated language learning websites, automated summarising software, corpora and concordancing software, blogs and machine translation. Assessment in this course comprises the completion of two written projects (each worth 50% of the final mark). Those who register on this module are typically novice CALL users and have limited experience with the integration of either generic or dedicated software into their language studies. Students come from a variety of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) courses such as Language and Cultural Studies, Applied Languages, Applied Languages and Computing, and Erasmus students. Furthermore, the class consists of students who are at different stages in their learning, with levels ranging from lower-intermediate to advanced stages. The main languages studied are English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Irish, French, Spanish and German. As such, the course provides these students with a valuable opportunity to adapt and personalise numerous types of CALLware to their individual needs as learners.

4.2 Task description

The main task established for the learners participating in this study was to create and maintain a blog which was strictly focused on their experiences as language learners over a twelve week period. This 'reflective blog' would provide a potentially helpful

Table 2 *Group profile and language output*

n = 42 Group size	
s = 25	total number of students who submitted essays
Distribution across language levels:	6 = Lower Intermediate; 16 = Intermediate; 1 = Higher; 2 = Advanced Total sample = 25
Average number of postings per week	3
Number of weeks	12
Average number of words per posting	121
Average total for postings	4356 words
Final essay	3000 words

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space for the student to contemplate their present strategies and approaches towards language learning in general. Keeping the content strictly language focused was a key factor in ensuring that the blog was exploited specifically for this purpose. Interestingly, this blog project was particularly popular with Erasmus students taking the course as part of the Study Abroad initiative. In fact, the blog emerged as a helpful tool whereby this specific group of learners could reflect on various intercultural factors which they had observed during the course of their stay at the host institution. Thus, we find from anecdotal evidence from colleagues in other similar institutions that many third level colleges are now planning to include a mandatory blog for outgoing students to complete during their stay abroad. Students who chose the blog project option had to fulfil the following criteria:

1. Create and maintain a blog in order to reflect upon the process of language learning.
2. Write one 3000 word essay in English, regarding the integration of the blog, using the various entries as examples in the analysis (as stated earlier, this is worth 50% of the final mark for the module).

4.3 Quantitative data and sources

In summary, the group profile and average language output may be thus represented in Table 2. It was interesting to note a sharp increase in the frequency and length of the postings from around week 7 of the course onwards.

4.4 Content

As this was initially a pilot study on the potential of blogs in SLA, learners were given a great deal of flexibility in terms of content and expression. Basically, learners could discuss any theme of interest as long as it related directly to their language learning. This may have included possible themes such as: reflecting on grammar acquisition, documenting and discussing visits to the multimedia lab, recording and considering various strategies used for particular language tasks. Although students had to adhere to the aforementioned criteria, it was decided not to impose too many restrictions or stipulations on them in order to make the experience as naturalistic as possible. As the level of participants in this study ranged from lower intermediate to advanced, the blogs completed by the learners were all written in the relevant target language. However, the researchers remained aware of the importance of accommodating post-beginner students who may have requested to complete the blog project in their native language. While this did not arise in this study, it was still acknowledged that some learners may benefit more from reflecting in their mother tongue, simply because their written skills in the target language may not be developed sufficiently for this type of exercise.

3.5 Context

The context of the blog project was presented to the learners as a potential task which could be continued after their completion of the course. This would be in direct contrast

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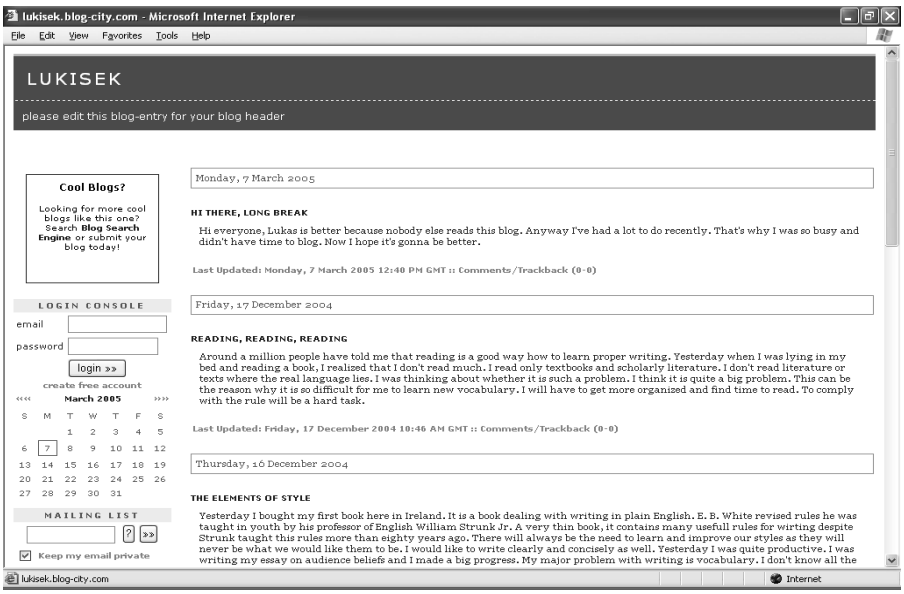


Fig 2. Example of a student reflective blog.

to a collaborative class blog which is normally discontinued after the completion of the module and is usually more specific in terms of content (Jeanneau & Batardière, 2006). As such, it was important to point out the significance of viewing one's language acquisition as part of a lifelong learning process, whereby maintaining a reflective language learning blog could be a potentially helpful tool for monitoring one's own progress and maintaining motivation over a long period of time. In addition, students would be developing useful transferable skills which could be adapted to other areas of their studies, thus enhancing their overall perception and integration of generic tools into their learning strategies.

In addition, the context in which these student blogs were created was typically 'individualistic' in nature. By individualistic we mean non-collaborative and that there was no 'micro blog community' established among the group of learners working on the project. Instead, while students remained aware of the 'macro blog context' or the more commonly known blogosphere, their blog addresses remained private within the classroom community and were not shared among the other participants. Again, this feature was not a stipulation of the assignment but was indicative of the freedom given to students in relation to both the reflective content and their decision regarding the promotion of their blog. In fact, learners had the option to publicise their blogs to others, if they so wished. Interestingly, the participants in this study chose not to promote their blogs among classmates, friends or family. In addition, the role of the teacher in monitoring a reflective and personalised blog by a learner was one main factor to consider, particularly in relation to the possibility of influencing their overall reflections. As a means to resolve this problem, the teacher adopted mainly an advisory role to the students in the initial setting up of the blog and secondly, a more observer-focused position which monitored the student's progress at various intervals during the semester.

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Table 3 *Some examples of L2 issues noted in intermediate level blogs*

L2 Writing Issues (intermediate students)	
Punctuation	I decided to stay in Ireland with my friend…at the very last moment she decided to go back France…Good Surprise
Lack of capitalisation	I have to learn the russian for my future job I met irish guys with beautiful kilt
Poor sentence structure	How many dead we need more to understand?
Syntax issues	I don't have done my exams yet…
Vocabulary problems	but the weather again disturbs us

4 Results and recommendations

As previously underlined, the language level of the students who participated in this study ranged from lower immediate to advanced stages. The students had to comply with keeping and maintaining the blog content over the course of the programme. Any linguistic mistakes made by the learners would not be corrected by the teacher in order to maintain a more naturalistic and real-life intimate blog space and, as Bloch reasons, in order to "draw out the more developed aspects of their language ability" (2007: 132). However, students' observations within the blog, as documented in their accompanying essay, would be marked according to the content analysis and structure, linguistic performance, and the depth and development of ideas. Firstly, let us briefly consider a number of issues which arose in relation to the specific language content of the blogs.

It appears that intermediate students, especially those within the lower-intermediate bracket, were prone to maintaining inconsistent standards in terms of their L2 written language production. Please refer to Table 3 for a summary of these themes. For example, the sentence structure at times tended to be quite careless and suggested that the learner was focusing more on trying to communicate the content rather than concentrating on making the output more accurate. One example of this would include leaving sentences hanging in mid air, without actively attempting to write more coherently. In fact, this at times resembled a 'stream of consciousness' effect, where the learner was actively working on gathering reflective content but failing to restructure the language into a more coherent output. Even though learners were aware that their blogs would be monitored at various intervals by the teacher, there was generally no attempt to refine the content as time progressed. This type of written style is echoed by Wrede (2003) in relation to the negative effect that text messaging is having on students'

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writings in general. Within the context of the blog space, this apparent lack of conscientiousness in their writing was certainly reflected in learners making quite basic grammatical mistakes, suggesting that many were not reading over their work. In addition, this group of learners tended to write more descriptive and reflective entries, focusing on issues such as deetailing a particular language class in college, recalling cultural visits and weekend activities. Thus, while the flow of ideas related to their language learning was certainly emerging to some degree, the level of reflection was general in nature and the actual quality of the L2 written output suffered somewhat. This was in direct contrast to more advanced learners who produced more critically reflective entries, tending to expand and develop areas which were simply generalised by their intermediate classmates.

While this task was mainly established to guide learners in terms of integrating the blog as part of a lifelong language learning strategy, it was also important to stress the significance of aiming to produce accurate language. Again, this depends on the context in which the task is integrated. As this was a Language and Technology module, dealing with students from different courses studying numerous language combinations with varying degrees of proficiency, the teacher made sure to reinforce frequently the importance of L2 production during the class. Understandably, had this been an L2 level specific module, there would have been greater time and flexibility to explore the SLA

Table 4 *Examples of reflections from advanced learners' blogs*

Language Learning Themes (advanced)	
Proofreading	How to effective and successful when proofreading our texts?
Style	Yesterday I bought my first book here in Ireland. It is a book with writing in plain English.
Expanding one's reading material	I don't read literature or texts where the real language lies.
Vocabulary acquisition	Today I had to think about my wordlists that I had created back home.
Translation	The word 'endorsement'. First I wanted to look up the dictionary, but I decided to ask some Irish students
Culture	I am sure that different languages express different realities

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context in more detail. We shall expand on this aspect in our conclusion to this paper. As such, the personalised essay based on the blog experience emerged as a valuable component of the exercise which could be potentially used by learners to reflect upon and assess their overall L2 written production. Unfortunately, students did not explore this theme sufficiently in their essays. This suggests the need to set mandatory themes for future learners which in turn can be personalised according to their individual reflections.

Moving on now to the particular themes discussed in the blogs, we notice the emergence of pertinent issues of concern to the learners such as:

- proofreading
- writing style
- reading material
- vocabulary acquisition
- culture

Please also see Table 4 which gives examples representing each of these themes.

This more critically reflective style noted in the blog postings of more advanced learners outlines a number of salient points. Firstly, it would appear that the higher L2 standard may enable the learner to contemplate more profound issues at the heart of their language studies. Understandably, as the learners gain more mastery in the target language, they are in a position to consider aspects other than grammar acquisition, such as intercultural communication, selecting appropriate reading materials or developing and refining their written style. Thus, one can expect to note certain differences in the content of blogs written by learners of different levels simply because their needs vary considerably at different stages of language acquisition. However, the contrasting approaches between the descriptive intermediate postings and the more critically reflective advanced entries compel us to consider more closely the impact of using the target language in blog writing. Evidently, in a context where critical reflection is the sole aim of the exercise, it may be advisable to make the task more flexible for the learner. Hence, if students feel that their current language level is not sufficient to express their ideas, then the option of blogging in their native language should be considered. However, if the teacher wants to establish a more SLA-centred approach, they may introduce a number of mandatory reflective themes into the exercise, as a means of guiding the intermediate learner with regard to producing more reflective content. Examples of such themes may include a teacher-led examination of genres and styles used in authentic blogs in order to act as a possible template in which to frame their reflections. A good starting point would be in devising appropriate student tasks for evaluating, for example, the credibility of these various authentic blog types (Rubin & Liddy, 2006; Johnson & Kaye, 2004).

5 Conclusion

Overall, the general integration of blogs into the language learning environment is relatively easy to establish. Blogs are highly adaptable generic production tools and thus provide great flexibility regarding their format and intended use. In terms of practicality,

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blogs provide teachers with an efficient and cost-effective tool which, if employed appropriately, present learners with an alternative means of (self-) expression in the online medium. As discussed, these writing spaces are adaptable to both individualistic and group project-based work and consequently offer many possibilities in terms of task creation and design. The main challenge lies in the teacher firstly integrating an appropriate blog assessment framework which matches the needs of the particular learners. Thus, as noted, both the expressivist and socio-cognitive paradigms are potential approaches which target and serve distinct aspects of the overall language learning experience.

For the purposes of this study, the establishment of an expressivist blog writing style allowed the learners to create a personalised reflective space which gave them the opportunity to contemplate their language learning strategies. While this was presented to the learners as a potential lifelong learning task, our results suggest that a balance must be achieved between simulating a real-life learning context and imposing certain themes in order to encourage more active reflection. This of course is dependent on the learner's current language level and may be particularly helpful to intermediate level students who may find the exercise quite challenging linguistically. As this task is an introduction to adapting blogs for this specific purpose, care must be taken to guide learners in their integration of this tool. Thus, if the reflective exercise in the target language results in the student experiencing task overload, switching to their L1 may help the learner to express their ideas more coherently. Hence, within an integration context, the teacher must adopt a flexible approach which will sufficiently reinforce the objectives of the task without alienating certain learners. It would then be hoped (with a genuine and real expectation) that the reflective skills acquired by learners would subsequently be continued and adapted as a lifelong language learning strategy.

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Additional web references

Example of diverse blog writing
http://www.rottentomatoes.com
http://ndj.blog.free.fr/aboutme.php
http://www.wilwheaton.net/
News media http://jeremythompson.typepad.com/
Political groups http://www.democrats.org/blog.html
Entertainment media http://www.mtv.com/news/correspondents/blogs/
Business world http://googleblog.blogspot.com/
Educational sector http://edublogs.org/
Autoblogs http://mylifeasareluctanthousewife.blogspot.com/

Examples of social media:
http://www.theweblogproject.com/

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