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Measuring Syntactic Maturity in the Written Performance of Tunisian Deaf Students

By Mouna Ayadi

Abstract:

This study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of integrating Tunisian deaf students into mainstream schools. It evaluates the suitability of these practices and their effectiveness in improving their syntactic maturity. The data collected during the study are based on triangulation of methods. A questionnaire was addressed to ten deaf students integrated in mainstream schools in Sfax, Tunisia, an interview to their teachers, and twenty writing samples collected from the observed population. The results found indicate that, overall, syntactic maturity of Tunisian deaf students did not improve when they were integrated in public schools. The T-unit mean scores of deaf students' written output revealed that integration did not help this minority achieve a better syntactic maturity in the second semester. Teachers' interviews also provided negative feedback about integration policies in the Tunisian classroom context. This article is a contribution to the research literature about deaf education which is scarce in the Tunisian EFL context.

Keywords: Deafness, Syntactic Maturity, Writing Skills, Integration Practices.

Introduction:

It is no secret that education is paramount in individuals' career. It is by education that people achieve higher attainments and lead prosperous life. However, many deaf people around the world continue to experience challenges in gaining appropriate and equal education to their hearing peers. Paul and Whitelaw (2011) claim that deafness includes in its broadest meaning "all degrees of hearing loss, from slight to profound, and is viewed as a disease; a disability; something that causes problems; something to eradicate, overcome, or prevent" (p.2). This disability prevents deaf people from attaining better educational levels.

Musselman and Szanto (1998) argue that literacy presents a risk for deaf students, and as a results, social integration and education are constrained for this minority (p.245). Many attempts have been done to assign an appropriate definition for the concept of literacy. The Program of International Student Assessment (2014) defines literacy as "an individual's capacity to understand, use and reflect on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society"(p.2) This definition deals with literacy from the broad perspective, which originates from sociology and anthropology. According to these paradigms, literacy is seen as a social practice. The narrow perspective, on the other hand, equates literacy with the two skills of reading and writing. Acquisition and mastery of these skills allow the individual to enter the job market and to integrate in life.

However, many deaf people face various difficulties in acquiring these skills, especially writing. Several researchers, such as Powers and Wilgus (1983) and Moores (1996), investigated the difficulties facing deaf and hard of hearing students while producing a written output. Antia et al. (2005) claim that many deaf students suffer with writing because of the difficulties they face in reading (p.245). Moreover, they claim that deaf students have problems at the micro level, which is the sentence level. Writing difficulties at this level consist in writing mechanics and the use of vocabulary. After analyzing deaf students' written performances using the Test of Written Language, Third

Edition (TOWL-3), Antia et al. (2005) found that 5% of the sample observed produced essays below the average. They conclude that "as a group, the D/HH students' writing needs improvement" (p.252).

Regarding the patterns of strengths and weaknesses in deaf students' writing, students who scored below average levels showed to have difficulties in contextual language, that is to say, vocabulary and syntax (Antia et al, 2005, p .252) Syntax also poses its own dilemma and represents a burden for deaf students. Berent et al. (2006) argue that "for the majority of deaf students, a major obstacle to the development of overall English literacy skills is the difficulty of mastering many of the most fundamental English grammatical forms and structures"(p.8). They also add that deaf students are significantly below their hearing peers in terms of syntax.

Investigating the efficiency of focus-on-form English teaching methods to improve deaf students' knowledge of English grammar, Berent et al. (2006) observed three groups of deaf students for ten weeks and concludes that focus-on-form methods are efficient methods to teach grammar. They state that "the employment of these methods resulted in students' significant improvement in knowledge of a set of basic grammatical formations over a 10-week period" (p. 21) Moreover, other difficulties in deaf and hard of hearing students' writing were detected. Yoshinaga-Itano, Snyder and Mayberry (1996) claim that deaf students write fewer words and sentences than their hearing peers.

This claim goes along with the results found in Marschark, Mouradian and Halas (1994) study on discourse rules in the written production of deaf students. Investigating the length of through-the-air stories of twenty two deaf participants, they found that deaf students, compared with their hearing peers, write short stories with few complex sentences, which is revealed through two indices namely the total number of words per story and the total number of syllables per story (p.103). They conclude that "deaf students produced significantly shorter stories than their hearing age-mates, as reflected both by the total number of words per story, F (1, 30) =5.01, MSe=8985 and the total number of syllables per story F (1, 30) =4, 39 MSe=16166 ... this difference is clarified by the finding

that the deaf students produced sentences with somewhat fewer words than did their hearing peers, $F(1,30) = 3,61$, $MSe = 17,68$, p <.07 , a result consistent with a variety of previous findings" (pp.103-104)

Additionally, deaf students face some difficulties in terms of negation. Ben Ayeche (2018) claims that "languages behave differently in the way they express negation" (p.43). In this respect, individuals acquire and express negation differently.

Geis (1970) investigated deaf students' acquisition of negation. She concluded that negation is acquired after the age of twelve for deaf students (as cited in Power, 1977, p.37). Investigating deaf children's acquisition of verb phrase negation, Power (1977) reached the conclusion that deaf students master approximately certain aspects of negation by the age of fourteen, however, semantic implications of negative markers are not well mastered (p.41). Furthermore, in a study conducted by Quigley, Montanelli and Wilbur (1975) on negation in deaf students, they concluded that "deaf students rejected negatives placed outside the sentence (no push boy) before incorrect ones inside (the boy no push the girl)" (as cited in Power, 1977, p .37).

In Tunisian Arabic, Ben Ayeche (2018) points out that negation can be expressed by adding the particle *laa* next to the verb (p.44). However, research on Tunisian deaf students' acquisition of negatives is very scarce. Thus, in light of all these types of difficulties and the researches done on the written production of deaf students, it is to be noted that many scholars such as Harrison (1988) have called for integrating deaf students in public schools in order to improve their educational achievement in general and their writing skills in particular (Angelides & Aravi,2006, p.477) .

According to the Encyclopedia of Learning Disabilities (2006) integration is defined as "the placement of disabled students in the regular education classroom, or in activities such as sports, field trips or school programs, with non handicapped students"(p.146). The concept of integration is about the idea of including disabled children in a regular educational setting with their non disabled mates in order to 'fit into' the educational system (Peel, 2004, p.12). The philosophical dimension of this concept consists in

integrating disabled learners earlier in schools so they can be integrated later on in society. Interest in special education started in the 1930's and 1940's with moral and social philosophies about the role and the values of integration. However, it is not until the 1970s that this ideology has flourished on the international level.

In 1960s and 1970s many civil right movements advocating integration practices have appeared. But it was until 1975 that the Public Law 94-142 was passed to ensure free and appropriate education for all handicapped children. Osgood (2005) argues that "since the enactment of PL94-142 the education for all handicapped children act of 1975, the united states has undergone a profound transformation in its efforts to provide a free and appropriate education for school-age individual with disabilities."(p.8) In addition, during "The World Conference on Special Needs Education" held in Spain in 1994, the Salamanca Statement was issued to promote the policy of integration and mainstreaming so that special needs children achieves full educational development.

Actually, in the Tunisian context, researches[1] show that 1.6% of the population has disabilities, with 12.5 % of them are deaf or hard of hearing. Moreover, the number of integrative schools that accept learners with special needs rose considerably to reach 330 schools in 2013 including 1500 special needs children. It is worth noting that, after the revolution (2011), the Tunisian educational system has undergone several reforms in order to provide free and comprehensive education for Tunisian special needs students.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate and describe the writing achievement of Tunisian deaf students integrated in mainstream schools in the region of Sfax, Tunisia. The problem that needs investigation is whether the syntactic maturity of deaf students develops thanks to the integration practices or whether this development is hindered due to other circumstances. The study serves to drive home the point that integration practices of Tunisian deaf students in mainstream schools help them achieve higher levels of literacy and gain appropriate education equal to their hearing peers. The specific research questions are as follows:

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[1] Percentages concerning the Tunisian context can be found in "the right for education in Tunisia brochure (2013) retrieved from: http://www.edunet.tn/index.php?id=548&lan=1#?

1-   Do the integration practices in mainstream schools help Tunisian deaf students develop their writing skills?

2-   What are the attitudes of deaf students towards integration practices?

3-   What are the attitudes of teachers towards integrating deaf students in mainstream schools?

The data for this study were collected in the region of Sfax, Tunisia where deaf students are integrated in public schools but still have special instruction at The Association of The Deaf (ATAS).

Methodology

Participant selection:

The purpose behind selecting this population is to give an idea about the educational problems that these students face. The ten participants are aged between 14 and 21 and have completed six years in the primary schools. Four of the participants are enrolled at preparatory schools and six of them at secondary schools. Their proficiency levels in English vary from beginners to pre-intermediate. Most of them were eligible to inclusion regarding the degree of their hearing loss. Three students have mild hearing loss, five have moderate deafness and just two suffer from profound deafness. In addition, four teachers participated in the interview. They were asked to give insights about their deaf students writing skills and about their attitudes towards integrating deaf students in their classes.

Data collection:

A triangulation of methods was used in order to get insights into the integration of Tunisian deaf students into mainstream schools. The corpus of the study is made up of a questionnaire addressed to Tunisian deaf students, an interview to their teachers and twenty writing samples collected from the population observed. The data collection procedures lasted four months. The collection of different samples was done during the two full-terms. First, the researcher administered the questionnaire to get information about deaf students' attitudes towards integration. Second, the researcher administered the

interview to the teachers having deaf students in their classes. Finally, the writing samples were collected during the observation period.

Students' characteristics

Nationality	Tunisian
Age	From 14 to 21
Gender	Female
Degree of hearing loss	4- Mild hearing loss:3 5- Moderate hearing loss:5 6- Profound hearing loss: 2
School level	7- 4 students at the preparatory school 8- 6 students at the secondary school
Language spoken	9- Tunisian Arabic 10- Sign language
Language studied at school	11- Standard Arabic 12- French (from third grade primary school) 13- English (from sixth grade primary school)
Proficiency level in English	From beginner to pre-intermediate

Instrument:

The instrument used to measure writing was Hunt Quantitative Measure of Syntactic Maturity (1965). This technique consisted in dividing the written output into units, or into "minimal terminal syntactic maturity", henceforth T-unit. Hunt (1965) defines this technique as: "They /t-unit/ are terminable in the sense that it is grammatically acceptable to terminate each one with a capital letter at the beginning and a period or question mark at the end. They are 'minimal' in the sense that they are the shortest units into which a piece of discourse can be cut without leaving any sentence fragments as residue…each is exactly one

main clause plus whatever subordinate clauses are attached to that main clause" (Qtd in Cooper, 1976,pp.4-5).

Hunt (1965) collected 18 written outputs and then analyzed them using transformational grammar analysis in an attempt to measure the relationship of embedding transformations to clauses and sentences (Cooper, 1976, p.4). The following step was to apply the five ratios to compute the syntactic maturity in the written composition of his participants. These five ratios are the mean number of words per clause, the mean number of clause per T-unit, the mean number of words per T-unit, the mean number of T-units per sentence and the mean number of words per sentence. Hunt's (1965) major findings are that the older participants used more sophisticated language, more genitives and prepositional phrases; and that the length of the T-unit can increase by adding non-clausal elements (Cooper, 1976, p.6).

Results

The results section presents:

a) The attitudes of deaf students participating in this study towards integration

b) Teachers 'perspectives towards integrating deaf students in mainstream schools

c) An analysis of Tunisian integrated deaf students' pre and post tests writing samples in order to detect the development in their writing abilities.

Attitudes of Tunisian deaf students towards integration

In order to get accurate information and clear ideas about deaf pupils' attitudes towards integration, a questionnaire was administered to the participants in the study. The questionnaire was divided into two parts; the first part helped the researcher to have more information about the participants, the second part dealt with the students' attitudes and preferences regarding integration practices. Asking Tunisian deaf students about their writing skills in English, 10% described it as excellent, that is to say, they can produce a well-written essay, whereas the majority (70% of the participants) described their written

performance as bad (the main reason is that they hate writing) and 20% described their writing as intermediate.

In a more specific question about integration, students were asked whether they prefer mainstream schools or special schools for the Deaf. The answer was positive unanimously, where 90% of Tunisian deaf students preferred public schools because these types of schools provide better and full instruction than special schools. However, exceptions are always there. 10% of the participants preferred going to both schools (public and private) because, even though deaf students get better instruction in public schools, they learn sign language in special schools which help them communicate with others. Dealing with their relationship with their classmates and teachers, the researcher asked Tunisian deaf students about whether they feel marginalized in public schools or not.

The results of this question showed that most of deaf students (80% of the participants) do not feel marginalized in their educational settings. However, 20% claimed that they sometimes feel marginalized, which indicates that they may face problems in their surroundings. The last question proposed was about whether integration in public schools helps them improve their literacy skills in general and their syntactic maturity in specific. By consensus, all students (100%) think that integration practices help them achieve educational success.

Teachers' perspectives towards integrating deaf students in mainstream schools

In order to get deep insight about their attitudes about integrating deaf pupils in public schools, an interview covering the topic investigated was administered to four teachers having deaf students in their classes. Asking teachers about their deaf students' writing, two teachers claimed that their deaf students are poor writers, and this is shown through the mistakes they make and sometimes through their lack of understanding to the topic assigned. The other two teachers claimed that the deaf students integrated in their cases are good writers and this is manifested through the grades they get in writing. Inquiring about whether the participant teachers modify their lessons and methods to

facilitate learning to deaf students, most teachers rejected the idea claiming that it is a waste of time and that they can't ignore the rest of the class.

However, one teacher claimed that he uses data show and video projections to make his deaf students better understand. In a question about their point of view concerning the integration practices of deaf students in public schools, the majority of teachers (90% of them) disagreed with these policies, claiming that deaf students should be educated in special schools for the deaf. Unlike the majority, 10% of the teachers agreed with these policies, claiming that integration in public schools help deaf students feel normal and lead a better life. In addition, they claim that deaf students have the right of equal education as their hearing peers.

In the last question during the interview, we sought to get some suggestions concerning the education of deaf students in Tunisia. One of the suggestions provided was that teachers should receive special training suitable for teaching deaf and language impaired students. In addition, other teachers suggested that schools should be equipped with more materials appropriate to teach deaf students. Last but not least, some teachers suggested that deaf students should be educated in special schools that provide special instruction and assistance to the deaf students.

Comparison of pre and post writing tests:

Before presenting the different results of the present study, four definitions should be provided: what is a word? What is a clause? What is a sentence? And what is a T-unit?

A word can be defined as: "a collocation of letters treated as a single word in a conventional dictionary entry", whereas a clause can be defined as: "a group of words containing a subject and a finite verb" (Taylor, 1969, p.69). The definition of a sentence is "a group of words occurring between two successive instances of terminal punctuation" (Taylor, 1969, p.71). Finally, Taylor (1969, p.70) defines a T-unit as "the main clause plus all dependent clauses subordinated to it".

Table1: Means of the indices from Hunt Quantitative Measure of Syntactic Maturity (1965)

	words per clause	clause per T-unit	words per T-unit	T-units per sentence	words per sentence
The pre test results	41.2	3.5	11.5	2.5	76.5
The post test results	35	1.37	9	1.5	66

The above table exhibits data from the different means of Hunt's syntactic analysis.

The writing samples were collected from the same group at different stages of integration (first and second semester). Measurement of the syntactic maturity of the deaf students detected a significant decrease in the five indices. The following conclusions can be drawn:

- In his study, Hunt (1970) found that clause length increased from level to level. Similarly, Rubin (1982) detected an increase in clause length in his students' writing when they write for a remote audience (Gregg, 1949, p.42). However, in the present study, the mean of words per clause has decreased in the second semester showing that deaf students wrote substantially less words.

- In the second column regarding clause per T-unit, it is clear that deaf students wrote less t-units in the second semester than the first semester.

- With a decrease in words per clause, it is expected to detect a decrease in words per

T-units. Deaf students tended to write shorter T-units in the second semester.

- Similarly, the fourth column regarding T-unit per sentence shows a decrease in the T-unit length.

- Correspondingly, the mean number of words per sentence decreased in the second semester, which shows that deaf students wrote slightly shorter sentences.

Discussion:

What was flagrant in the results of the present research is the progressive decrease is the five indices used to analyze the syntactic maturity of Tunisian deaf students. The results of the five ratios showed a decrease in the written output length of deaf students in the second semester, which is revealed by the marked differences in the statistical results exhibited in Table 1. Regarding the results of the mean composition length, it has declined in the second semester with a difference of 6.2 (from 41.2 in the first semester to 35 in the second semester). This was not the case in the study conducted by Taylor (1969) who concluded that the mean number of words per clause increased with age in the Deaf students. She states that: "the findings on the first variable listed above, mean composition length, reveal the same developmental trend observed in earlier language development studies on both deaf and hearing children. That is that composition length increases with age." (Taylor, 1969, p.152)

The second ratio exhibited a narrow down in the results as well. From 3.5 in the first semester to 1.37 in the second semester, the mean number of clause per T-unit shows a statistically significant decrease. In his research, Taylor (1969) argues that: "findings on this variable for the deaf group, however, are not easily accounted for. Although the mean number of clauses per T-unit shows a general increase with advancing grade level, the increase is not a steady one. Instead, there is a modest increase between grades three and five, a dramatic and statistically significant increase between grade five and seven, followed by a statistically significant decrease between grades seven and nine"(p.163)

Computing the mean T-unit length, the results were similar to the previous indices. A decline in the statistics obtained between the two semesters was detected. However, Taylor (1963) affirms that: "in the case of the deaf group there is a continued increase from grade three to grade seven with a significant increase occurring between grades five and seven"(p.167)

The results of the fourth ratio were not consonant with the results of Hunt (1965) and Todd (1969). In both studies, the researchers concluded that the T-unit length per

sentence increased in a steady way. Taylor (1969) asserts that the increase occurred between grades five and nine, which implies that the older deaf student, write longer sentences. (p.172)

However, in the present study, deaf students wrote shorter sentences in the second semester.

The last ratio consisted in computing the mean sentence length in the written output of Tunisian deaf students. Comparable to the previous variables, the results showed a decline from the first to the second semester. Contrary to the results of this study, the research conducted by Taylor (1969) proved an increase in the sentence length of deaf students. She claims that: "mean sentence length for the deaf group shows a fairly steady and significant increase with advancing grade level, with a significant increase occurring between grades five and seven". (p.173)

Implications for Research and Practice:

Researchers are beginning to recognize the need for integrating students with learning disabilities in general, and deaf students in particular in mainstream schools. It cannot be denied that integrating these individuals' help them achieve better educational goals and lead a better social life.

In relation to the teaching practices, many researchers such as Wooten (2014) advocated the use of online learning for deaf students. She claimed that online learning has increased for deaf students in the US because these learning tools helped improve deaf students' interactions with computers and technology (p.3)

Integrating the use of technology in the teaching/learning of deaf students is of paramount importance in Tunisia. Mohamed (2014) claims that technology provides students with real opportunities to practice the language (p.4) In this respect, Jemni and Elghoul (2008) have created an environment that helps deaf students improve their communication abilities (p.1)

Using ICT helps them improve their communication and visual capabilities by combining the text and animations in the learning context (p.1). Other researchers such as Khenissi et al. (2015) advocated the use of computer games to improve teaching/learning of deaf students (p.1). They presented a learning game called Memory Match Game for Deaf Learners. They claim that this game helps improve vocabulary learning in deaf students.

In sum, there is a need to engage in studies that report the effects of integrating the use of ICT in the teaching/learning of Tunisian deaf students. Also, attending to better literacy results must be present in teachers' practices in the classroom because what matters in deaf education is that they progress in their learning as their hearing peers.

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Which is which? The Face or the Book: Tunisian EFL learners' Use of Facebook in L2 Paragraph Writing

By Wided Sassi

Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences Kairouan, Tunisia

Abstract

Noticing its exponential growth, many educators sought to tap in the potential of harnessing Facebook for educational purposes (Roblyer et al. 2010; Selwyn 2009; Simpson, 2012). Evidence from the literature suggests that, if used judiciously, Facebook can turn into a facilitative platform for language learning beyond the restrictions of traditional provisions (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010; Yunus & Salehi, 2012). VanDoorn and Eklund (2013) suggest that the Facebook environment, in fact, bears significant resemblance in structure to that of a concrete classroom "-with walls to write on, and party invitations to distribute- and it is perhaps this…that has driven researchers to investigate the potential of Facebook-based social networking to enhance learning" (p.1). Hilscher (2012) further stipulates that the "social nature of Facebook lends itself to the possibility of being used as a virtual learning community" (p.24). Its communicative and interactive functionalities are similarly felt to "mirror much of what we know to be good models of learning, in that they are collaborative and encourage an active participatory role for users" (Maloney, 2017, p.

26). Mills (2011), in a similar vein, concurs that Facebook provides new avenues for students to explore cultural differences and build positive rapport.

1. Introduction :

In February 2004, Harvard sophomore Mark Zuckerberg in collaboration with two of his peer, namely Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes, officially launched 'Facebook.com' from their college dormitory room (Markoff, 2007). Initially, the site was intended to foster in-campus communication but its sweeping popularity exceeded all expectations. Today, with reports of more than 1.65 billion subscribers worldwide (Facebook, 2016), Facebook has turned into a leading networking site. Latest statistics suggest that one in five people of the total seven billion population of the world uses the site on a regular basis (Halleck, 2016). Subscribers are reported to spend more than seven hundred billion minutes per month on the site; superseding every other form of communication (Lenhart, 2009, p. 10).

Noticing its exponential growth, many educators sought to tap in the potential of harnessing Facebook for educational purposes (Roblyer et al. 2010; Selwyn 2009; Simpson, 2012). Evidence from the literature suggests that, if used judiciously, Facebook can turn into a facilitative platform for language learning beyond the restrictions of traditional provisions (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010; Yunus & Salehi, 2012). VanDoorn and Eklund (2013) suggest that the Facebook environment, in fact, bears significant resemblance in structure to that of a concrete classroom "-with walls to write on, and party invitations to distribute- and it is perhaps this…that has driven researchers to investigate the potential of Facebook-based social networking to enhance learning" (p.1). Hilscher (2012) further stipulates that the "social nature of Facebook lends itself to the possibility of being used as a virtual learning community" (p.24). Its communicative and interactive functionalities are similarly felt to "mirror much of what we know to be good models of learning, in that they are collaborative and encourage an active participatory role for users" (Maloney, 2017, p. 26). Mills (2011), in a similar vein, concurs that Facebook provides new avenues for students to explore cultural differences and build positive rapport.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In Tunisia, the total number of Facebook subscribers has stepped the threshold of 2.6 million users as of December 2014 (Facebook, 2016). Despite these encouraging figures

as well as promising anecdotal evidence, scant attention has been given to this area of research. In his article "Can Facebook or wikis hook learners instead of the schoolbook?" Brahmi (2016) compared the results of using wikis and Facebook in enhancing students' motivation towards learning English. His study concluded that blending an otherwise standard language class with Facebook or wikis boosted the learners' confidence, and further motivated them to interact and practice the target language. The findings of this research, albeit not dedicated to Facebook in its own right, attest to the opportunities arising from blending social media with existing educational pedagogies. The dearth of research on the matter on the one hand and the promising prospects of social networking sites in the context of L2 writing instruction on the other hand represent the driving motive for this research.

1.2 Research Objectives

The objective of this study is two-fold. Given the importance of exploring participants' attitudes before undertaking any research endeavor, as these are most likely to affect the latter's findings and implications, this study attempts to explore Tunisian EFL learners' attitudes towards the implementation of Facebook to teach writing. Second, it aims at exploring the potentiality of Facebook in enhancing students' paragraph writing skills.

'Why writing in particular?' one might wonder. The answer lies, in part, in the reiterated complaints Tunisian English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers express about the poor quality of their students' writing (Mahfoudhi, 1999, p.1). Being a writing instructor herself, the researcher very often feels inhibited by the acute lack of opportunities for students to write in class due to a relatively high rate of absenteeism, class size or time constraints. Furthermore, given the importance of the writing medium in examination, the challenges students face in writing classes are most likely to affect their overall academic achievement (Mahfoudhi, 2001). Additionally, in a context where the target language is hardly used for any naturally occurring written communication, learners are left with formal instruction as the sole venue to practice their writing skills (Bayoudh, 2003; Sellami, 2006). The researcher therefore thought that she may leverage her students' enthusiasm for social media towards enhancing their writing abilities.

1.3 Research Questions

The present study aims at finding answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of Tunisian EFL learners towards the use of Facebook as a support tool in writing instruction?

2. How does Facebook affect students' paragraph writing skills?

3. What function(s) does Facebook-mediated interaction have?

4. How do students evaluate the use of Facebook in EFL writing?

2. Literature Review

Despite being primarily identified as a social networking site for building interpersonal relationships, Facebook is quickly being recognized as a respectable e-learning platform (Bosch, 2009). While an exhaustive review of the research on the use of Facebook for academic purposes is far beyond the scope of this paper, it is, nonetheless, of major importance to review research of relevance to our study. The next section, as such, contends its review to those studies investigating the roles of Facebook in teaching writing.

2.1 A Facebook- assisted Writing Approach?

One of the most often cited research about the opportunities Facebook can harness for teaching foreign language writing is that of Shih (2011). In his study, Shih explored the effects of integrating a Facebook component into a regular writing curriculum on the development of a group of Taiwanese ESL students' composition skills. Twenty-three freshmen majoring in English at a technological university in Taiwan took part in the study. The experiment run over two- thirds of a semester and both quantitative and qualitative data were generated to address the research problem. As part of the experiment, informants were assigned to three different proficiency groups "(high score = 91 points and above, medium score = 70-89 points, and low score = 70 points and below) according to their English subject scores on the National College Entrance Examination in 2011" (p.822). Students with the worst results in the pre-test were required to post their assignments on a Facebook group. On a later stage, learners with higher scores had to give constructive feedback on their classmates' writing. Findings suggest that using Facebook considerably

improved students' writing skills and perked up their performance in different areas including "grammar, structure and content, organization, and vocabulary" (p.841). Peer appraisal was found to foster collaborative knowledge construction as well as students' intrinsic motivation.

In his 2011 research, Al-Shehri gave further evidence of the potentiality of Facebook as a support to teach writing. His study aimed at exploring the effects of blending the use of mobile devices and social networking on out-of-class language learning. A total of thirty-three male Saudi university students at King Khalid University participated in the experimental phase. Participants were instructed to "to post photos or short videos and to add captions, descriptions, or starter questions to a Facebook group" (p. 21). Facebook was found to offer greater opportunities for students to collaborate and use the written form of the target language. Findings point that the nature of the content posted had a great impact on the interaction generated on the Facebook page. The more interesting and novel the uploaded material was, the likelier the students were to comment on it. "In contrast, most students were not keen to collaborate in English when they thought the post in question was not linguistically or contextually valuable or did not add new information"(p.21).

Exploring the attitudes of a cohort of Malaysian students about Facebook as well as the latter's effectiveness in teaching writing, Yunus and Salehi (2012) carried out a mixed-research case study. The subjects were forty-three English majors at the Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan. A questionnaire and a "Students' online discussion board" on a Facebook group, "Write Out Loud", were used to generate data (p.87). Results suggest that interaction on Facebook offered meaningful and genuine EFL writing and critical thinking exercise for the participants. Findings also indicate that the group was highly effective in enhancing the students' writing skills, especially in the prewriting stage. Facebook was equally found to heighten students' engagement and interest in language learning. The researchers conclude that respondents widened their "vocabulary from reading the comments of others in the group, and the spell-check feature helps reduce their spelling errors. In addition, the ideas or opinions by peers help them in getting a better idea for writing" (p.95).

More recently, Bani-Hani , Al-Sobh and Abu-Melhim (2014) conducted a research on the role of Facebook groups in enhancing writing performance of 42 Jordanian EFL Students at Irbid University College. The study made use of a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods and aimed at investigating student perceptions' about the use of a Facebook group as a learning platform. A Facebook group by the name "Write Out Clear" was used in this research. Participants had to share their writings and interact using the target language (English) as a requirement of the study. Findings attest to the worth of Facebook groups in teaching EFL writing. Results confirm that students can develop their vocabulary and use Facebook grammar and spelling checkers to correct faulty constructions and misspelled words.

Whilst the positioning of Facebook as a learning/teaching aid seems to be gaining momentum amongst educational communities, skepticism still abounds within some sections about its worth (Blattner & Fiori,2009; Ellison et al., 2007). Some teachers have raised real concerns that Facebook could hasten the surge of an intellectually de-powered internet savvy generation incapable of autonomous critical thinking (Barbazon, 2007). Fears that social networks, in particular Facebook, might jeopardize learners' adherence to traditional face-to-face instructional provisions have also been voiced (Selwyn, 2009). Kabilan et al. (2010) caution that Facebook may turn into a source of distraction for students given the multitude of fun functionalities it offers. Interestingly, they proclaim that some students may still prefer traditional classroom pedagogy because it caters more to their individual needs.

The ensuing polemic with all its conflicting renderings about Facebook's potentiality as a learning tool undoubtedly calls for more empirical research to settle the argument in favor of one opinion or the other and it is within this scope that this study operates. To weigh in the debate, the researcher took the view that anchoring her conclusions on existing scholarship should add to the soundness and originality of this research. Accordingly, a Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) of learning is to be implemented in the interpretations of the data. An explanation of the main tenets and rationale of a Socio-Cultural perspective is provided below.

2.2 Socio-Cultural Theory

Socio-cultural Theory is a unified theory of mental development premised on earlier thoughts of the Russian psychologist Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (Lantolf, 2004, p.199). According to Lantolf (2004), Socio-Cultural Theory is neither a theory of the social nor the cultural aspects of human existence. It is, rather, a theory of mind that recognizes the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artifacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking (p.30). Vygotsky's most controversial contention is that "it is inappropriate to attribute human psychological functioning solely to biology or to the social world as both are absolutely necessary" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.256). Although Vygotsky recognizes the importance of biological factors in the development of lower forms of cognition, he stresses cultural forces in the maturity of higher-level mental functions. From such a perspective, cognitive development is regarded as an inherently social act embedded in a specific cultural environment (Lantolf, 2004).

In Vygotsky's view,

> Any function in the child's cultural development appears on stage twice, that is, on two planes. It firstly appears on the social plane and then on a as the transition from a figurative locus outside the learner in the interpsychological plane to a more innate stratum within the individual in the intrapsychological plane. (Ohta, 2000, p. 54)

For this transition to take place, participation in social practices or activities is crucial (Macke & Gass, 2005)

According to Wertsch (1979), the construct of mediation has made Vygotsky's most important and unique contribution to the field of developmental psychology. Instead of acting directly in the social and physical world surrounding them, human contact with the world is indirect, mediated, to a degree unparalleled in other species, by auxiliary means. Intermediaries are culturally-constructed artifacts that help humans transcend their biological limitations and subject the environment to their will.

Vygotsky discerned two broad classes of mediators, namely tools and signs. While both could be envisaged as types of tools, one psychological and the other physical, the

basis for a real divergence of the two lines is via their functional properties. Tools typically "act as a buffer between an individual and the environment and mediate between the person and his/her social/physical world" (Lantolf &Thorne, 2007, p.60). They are orientated outwards and directly modify the object. A frequently cited example of tools is that of a shovel that one can use to dig a hole (Lantolf, 2004, p.256). Signs, on the other hand, are means that assist individuals to develop what Vygotsky described as higher forms of consciousness that are unique to humans (Vygotsky, 1978). They are orientated inwards; they act on mind and behavior and are therefore "reversible" (Lee, 1985, p.76). Daniels (2011) points out that signs are " artificial and of social rather than organic or individual origin" (p.15).Under this heading Vygotsky included elements such as : "various systems for counting; mnemonic techniques; algebraic symbol systems; works of art; writing; schemes, diagrams, maps, and mechanical drawings; all sorts of conventional signs" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 137). However language, in Vygotsky's view, is "the most pervasive and powerful cultural artifact that humans possess to mediate their connection to the world, to each other, and to themselves"(Lantolf & Thorne, 2007, p.1). As a psychological tool, "human speech has a dual mediational macro-function: a primary function, to mediate our social activity, and a secondary function, to mediate our mental activity" (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p.439).

A third type of mediation according to Kozulin (1998) could be through another individual. Cognitive development is made possible and fostered by meaningful exchanges between people. In joint activities, a learner's personal knowledge and social knowledge interact and both of them may be changed during the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978). Generally, the less capable participant receives assistance that is finely tuned to his/her needs from another more knowledgeable partner, and therefore, reaches levels that he/she was not likely to attain when acting independently. This gap between "the actual developmental level as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" is referred to as the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD) in the literature (Ohta, 2001, p.9). The process whereby the expert assists the learner in a problem-solving task reaching goals beyond the learner's range of abilities is what Bruner (1978) refers to as scaffolding.

3. Research Methodology

In pursing the research objectives stated above, a mixed research design was deemed most suitable. More specifically, a case study research method was opted for. According to Yin (2008), a case study is an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context" (p.18). The research site of the present study is the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Kairouan. A brief description of the writing course could give an insight into the context of the present research endeavor. The writing course is taught as a subordinate component of the LANGUAGE I module which consists of Grammar, Reading strategies, and Writing strategies. Writing is taught for two hours per week. Although the official curriculum advocates that reading and writing should be taught integratively, very little connection is felt to mirror this stance. Different teachers teach the reading and writing classes with very little coordination as to the content and methodology to be implemented.

In the absence of a standardized course, in-service teachers have developed a 'hybrid' course. As stated in the official course description, the overall objective of the writing class is to prepare students to write a variety of texts in different genres. The focus of the first semester writing class for example is on paragraph types including cause, effect, comparison, contrast, and narrative paragraphs. During the second semester, the emphasis shifts to essay writing. The approach used in teaching writing is rather eclectic: teachers not only try to make students learn organizational and textual features but they also seek to imbue them with an awareness of the intricacy of the writing process. Yet, despite teachers' attempts to strike a balance between a process-based and a product-based approach, the course remains heavily theoretical and students rarely find any real opportunities to write in class.

3.1 Participants

A total number of twenty-three first-year-students enrolled at the Department of English Language and Literature the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences Kairouan were selected as subjects for this case study. The sampling of the participants was mainly purposive according to their abilities to best meet the research questions and objectives.

The recruitment of the participants was primarily influenced by their knowledge about the issues being investigated, their willing to take part in the study and their potential to represent the larger population (Saunders *et al.,* 2003). Informants were included on the grounds that they have Facebook accounts and are familiar with all its different features. These students, moreover, can be fairly described as typical of the university population in Tunisia in general. They roughly share the same cultural and educational background. Worth noting is that no distinction between male and female was done within this research, nor was there a separation between the learners according to their age, academic background, and English language skills.

3.2 Instruments

To elicit the data needed for this study, multiple data collection techniques have been deployed. Such a decision is motivated by the belief that exclusively relying on one source of data comes at disadvantage of being very limited (Creswell, 2008). Data for the present research originated from a questionnaire, a Facebook group and interviews as described in the sections below.

3.2.1 Questionnaires:

Given the scarcity of research about Facebook as an educational aid in Tunisia, it was important to establish a body of data as a starting point for this inquiry. Gaining an insight into the students' current use and attitudes towards the potentiality of Facebook was believed to offer a perspective into their expectations and readiness to use the latter in educational settings before indeed embarking on any actual experiment. To this end a paper-based questionnaire (see appendix A) was implemented in gathering the data.

Devised after a fairly extensive review of related literature, the questionnaire consisted of 12 items and was divided into three sections. Questions relating to informants' Facebook history and its frequency of use were asked in the first section. Section two was designed to investigate the different uses of the Facebook. In the third section, informants were asked to give their opinions towards Facebook capacity to facilitate/ inhibit their EFL

writing. Following Fowler's (2012) guidelines, the researcher made sure that all statements and questions were clearly worded and caused no language-related misinterpretations. Furthermore, an early draft of the questionnaire was pilot tested on a small scale sample consisting of 10 learners, the kinds of individuals that would be required to respond in the final data collection stage before administering the final version.

3.2.2 A Facebook group

To assist her first year English students with writing paragraphs, the teacher / researcher designed the following Facebook group : 'The Writing Lab: FLSHK' https://www.facebook.com/groups/1703620766524350 as a supplementary resource to her regular composition classes.

The experiment extended over a semester and proceeded as follows. Once a week, the teacher meets with her students for their regular writing classes. At the end of the session she assigns a paragraph writing task. A total of three cause paragraph writing assignments were posted on the course Facebook group. These are:

Prompt 1: Write a cause paragraph in which you explain why Tunisia is a wonderful place to visit.

Prompt 2: Write a cause paragraph in which you explain why you decided to study English.

Prompt 3 : Write a paragraph about the causes of violence against women in Tunisia.

Members of the Facebook group were required to post their writings on the site. They were equally invited to read their friends' paragraphs and comment on them. The commenting period lasted for one week. Following their friends' feedback, students would rewrite their paragraphs and upload them on the group.

All paragraphs used as data in this study were independently graded by two professional raters following an analytic scoring rubric adapted from Jacobs et al. (1981). The rubric is divided into five rating dimensions, each evaluating a different aspect of writing namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanic. The original rubric used a 100-point scale, distributed variously on the different rating dimensions. But,

due to the raters' familiarity with grading schemes out of twenty, all original scales were divided by 5 to obtain a maximum score of 20.

The raters were experienced EFL composition teachers with a respectable experience in teaching (11 and 9 years) and extensive knowledge of the course and its assessment requirements. Prior to the initiation of the experiment, both raters attended two sessions of training to ensure performance of assessments in accordance with the rubric. Later, they were asked to independently assess three different paragraphs using the same grading rubric. This step was meant to determine the consistency across raters' scores of the same performance being assessed. The inter-rater reliability was determined using Pearson Product Moments Correlation Analysis. The correlation coefficient was r= .96, which indicated a high level of consistency among the raters' grading.

3.2.3 Interviews

Once the experimental phase came to an end, 13 randomly selected participants were interviewed face-to-face. The interviews sought to triangulate and offer insight into phenomena that could hardly otherwise be directly observed, such as "attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices" (Creswell, 2112, p. 378). The interview was mainly semi-structured. It consisted of 10 open-ended items and focused on the students' use of the course Facebook page, their attitudes regarding its usefulness, suggestions for improvement, and ultimately their perspective on its future as a student support tool. The interviews were conducted after class ran over 30 to 40 minutes each. A mobile phone was used to record the discussions for later analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

Beyond evaluating students' performance, however, a second goal of carrying out this research was to see how the interaction among learners on the course Facebook group could contribute to the enhancement of their writing skills. In line with the researcher's constructivist stance, a sociocultural discourse analysis (SCDA) framework was used in approaching the data generated on the Facebook group discussion board.

Partly devised in response to the perceived weakness of "the 'micro-level of social interaction' common to traditional conversation analysis (Mercer, Littleton & Wegerif, 2004) on the one hand, and to the context-stripped nature of analysis of large datasets, such as through coding or 'systematic observation' on the other "(Twiner, 2111), SCDA is a comprehensive analytical tool that strives to offer a better insight into the contextualised and dynamic nature of talk (Mercer, 2004, p. 146). Mercer, Littleton and Wegerif (2004) explain " 'Sociocultural' discourse analysis differs from 'linguistic' discourse analysis in being less concerned with the organizational structure of spoken language, and more with its content, function and the ways shared understanding is developed, in social context, overtime' (p. 203). This methodology indeed not only underscores the importance of language as a means in pursuing "joint plans of action" but also as a mode of "joint knowledge construction" (Mercer, 2004, p. 137).

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Questionnaire results:

The questionnaire generated valuable data pertaining to students' attitudes towards the potentiality of Facebook as a support to learning and teaching. Out of 154 questionnaires distributed in total, only 138 met the inclusion criteria (being fully completed) and deemed usable for this research. As explained above, although the main objective of this study was initially to verify the utility of using Facebook in teaching writing, it was important to investigate the popularity of Facebook and its uses among Tunisian EFL learners in the absence of a relevant body of data.

Informants were asked whether they have a Facebook account and how often they used it. Results indicate that Facebook is very popular among students in the sample. As captured in Figure 1, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (94%) confirm that they are active Facebook users, with 8% of the sample reporting having more than one account. Only a minority of the informants (6%) claim that they are not Facebook subscribers. Among these two students contend that they deliberately avoid using social networks in general for personal reasons while the four remaining students are open to the

idea of having an account in the future. Such figures attest to the popularity of social media in Tunisia. This could be accounted for by the fairly high internet penetration rate in the area, the site's free access, and its ease of use. The ever-growing popularity of high tech mobile devices including smart phones and tablets made it even easier for students to access their accounts anywhere, and at anytime.

Almost all informants are familiar with Facebook and seem to be well-versed in its different functionalities. Respondents report that they use the site for various purposes including re/connecting with friends or making new ones, chatting with, and calling other Facebook subscribers. Checking the news and updates, posting status updates/photos/videos and sharing links are also common uses of Facebook. Less common though is the use of Facebook to play games online, follow public figures or to create and respond to events. Interestingly, a considerable number of informants (61%) report that they use Facebook for "educational" purposes. They claim to visit English language learning pages, view videos or read articles in English, answer quizzes, and interact with other English speaking users from all over the world.

The second section of the questionnaire was geared towards investigating students' attitudes about the potentiality of Facebook as an educational tool to teaching L2 writing. Respondents were requested to choose a statement that best fits their position on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1= strongly agree, 2= agree, 3= neutral, 4= disagree, and 5= strongly disagree. The responses with their percentages are presented in the following figure.

Figure 1 Students' Attitudes towards Using Facebook in L2 Writing Instruction
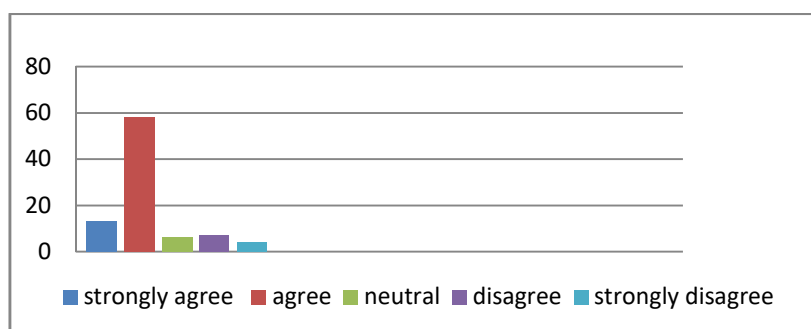
Overall, respondents feel very optimistic about the opportunity Facebook can present as a learning aid. In their view Facebook can be an effective tool for them to have access to course related material, engage in discussions with peers, and even post assignments online.

Students also feel that Facebook can give them a rare chance to use the target language outside the classroom.

Yet, despite the general enthusiasm towards Facebook as an educational tool, it should be pointed out that some participants were skeptical about the potentiality of the site in enhancing their writing. Due to its recognized "informal" nature, many students find it hard to perceive Facebook as a reliable source of learning. For them, Facebook is generically associated with entertainment and relaxed activities. A second concern had to do with privacy issues. Some informants believed that there must be a separation between public and private domains.

4.2 Facebook as a tool to teaching writing

Research question two aimed at exploring the utility of Facebook as an English Language Teaching supportive tool. Results from the facebook group suggest that the site can be very useful in L2 writing instruction. Indeed, students wrote about different topics and were very eager to share their writings. A total of 183 paragraphs were posted on the Facebook group. 126 paragraphs were part of the tasks assigned by the teacher as part of the experiment. The rest were extra writings which students chose to share on the site. Due to the overload of data generated on the Facebook group, 15 randomly selected participants (from a total 19 students who completed all three tasks) were used for the data analysis. All paragraphs were graded by two different raters following an analytic grading rubric adapted from Jacobs et al. (1981). A comparison of the first draft and the final draft scores shows that students made a noticeable improvement in their writing. A detailed grid of both scores is provided below:

Table 1

Students' Scores as distributed across the different prompts

	Student ID	H.T	A.Z	S.M	A.B	A.K	M.R	T.I	L.B	S.A	R.N	H.N	N.R	K.A	H.H	Z.S
Prompt 1	Initial draft score	8	10	10	7	11	8	6	8	9	10	5,5	9	7	6	12
	Final draft score	10	11	10	8	13	8	7	7	11	12	7	11	9	6	14
Prompt 2	Initial draft score	10	10	11	8	10	9	7	9	8	9	7	10	9	7	13
	Final draft score	10	11	14	8	11	10	6	10	8	9	7	11	9	8	14
Prompt 3	Initial draft score	9	11	12	8	12	9	7	9	9	10	7	9	8	7	12
	Final draft score	10	13	14	8	13	10	7	10	11	11	6	10	8	7	12.5

As shown by these figures, almost all the scores allotted to students on their initial drafts recorded some kind, although sometimes minor, of progress; a fact which is further corroborated by evidence from the gained mean scores of the class. Students' performance in paragraph writing improved from the initial draft to the final one. In prompt 1 for example students made a progress of 1.17 %. In prompt 2, an improvement of 0.60% was recorded and in prompt 3 the scores increased by 1.03%. To determine which areas in particular were improved the most /the least, all initial scores obtained in the different grading subcategories were cross-checked against the final ones. Data shows that students' writing skills improved with varying degrees in almost all scaling subcategories. Results suggest that progress varied from one student to another and across assignments. Content and organization are areas that have been improved the most. Vocabulary and mechanics come next while language use was the least area to have improved. To showcase the improvement a student made, consider the following example:

In the following example the students commented on their friends' paragraph. The feedback touched on various aspects including content, vocabulary and language use. The final draft was revised in light of the above comments and partly read:

Compared to the first draft, the final draft was enhanced in many aspects. The edited version incorporated many of the changes suggested by classmates.

Beyond evaluating students' performance, however, a second goal of carrying out this research was to see how the interaction among learners on the course Facebook group contributed to the enhancement of their writing skills. A detailed discussion of findings related to this aspect is provided next.

4.2.1 Interaction on the Facebook Group

The decision to incorporate results that emerged on the Facebook group discussion stems from the belief that writing is a multi-faceted cognitive process where revision is an integral element. Besides the role of peer interaction in language classrooms has been widely acknowledged (Tsui & Ng, 2000). Yet, to the researcher's best knowledge, research on peer revision in Tunisia via social networks is nonexistent.

Data from the Facebook discussion board were collected and divided into broad episodes for analysis according to their capacity to provide valuable information in relation to the research questions. In line with Nassaji and Wells (2000), an 'episode' was defined as being 'made up of sequences that, individually and cumulatively, contribute to the achievement of the activity or task goal. Each sequence consists of an ... exchange ... each exchange consists of obligatory Initiating and Responding moves and may also contain a Follow up move' (p. 383). Episodes were later analyzed following a Socio-Cultural Discourse Analysis Framework (2004). Students' interactions were linked to three main functions namely: Mediation, scaffolding and establishing intersubjectivity. These are discussed in further details in the next sections.

4.2.1.1   Facebook as a meditational tool

As explained earlier, mediators are intermediaries that humans resort to transcend their physical limitations. In her 1996 study, Haas extended Vygotsky's categorization of mediators to encompass the use of technologies as one of the psychological tools and sign systems. In this regard, she asserts: "Vygotsky's theory of mediation helps us see tools, signs, and technologies as ... systems that function to augment human psychological processing" (Haas, p. 17). In line with this distinction, Facebook can be considered a mediator, one that not only helps students transcend the constraints of time and place, but also assists them in developing better understanding of the task at hands, and hence reach higher intellectual abilities.

Mercer (2004) explains that when working together, individuals not only initiate and sustain socialization, where supportive environments are created, but they mutually set goals and pool together their resources in order to reach their aims, inevitably leading to co- construction of knowledge (p. 162).This process is specifically what he refers to as mental mediation or 'inter-thinking'. Inter-thinking was evidenced in the data corpus through a variety of talk forms namely disputational, cumulative and exploratory. Due to space constraints, in what follows only an example of each is provided.

One of the characterizing features of disputational talk is its individualized and disruptive nature. This kind of talk is typically noted for the rare instances of joint reasoning and collaboration. Such discourse mostly features patterns of assertion and counter-assertion where different speakers maintain an unwavering attitude and do very little to change it. The following exchange between three students is illustrative of this tendency:

A: in Tunisia, violence against women reached alarming rates.

B: this is an example and not a TS

A: hhhh, how?

B: because you give details, statistics

A: Details? This is a general sentence

B: I don't think so, you are talking about statistics so this is a detail…

A: No, it s not… what statistics??? Can you give me an exact percentage???

B: it doesn't have numbers, but the TS should neither be too general, nor too specific

A: No comment

As shown in the above interaction, communication was quite unproductive. Students A and B fail to reach a common understanding of the characteristics of a good topic sentence. Their discussion is mostly geared towards ascertaining or promoting individualistic vision on how the task at hand should be approached. Eventually, communication breaks down as both speakers hang on to their adamant point of views.

Various instances of cumulative talk, in which speakers "construct positively but uncritically a common knowledge of what others have said" (Mercer, 2011) have been

discerned in the data. In the next episode, the discussion is found to be very representative of such talk form.
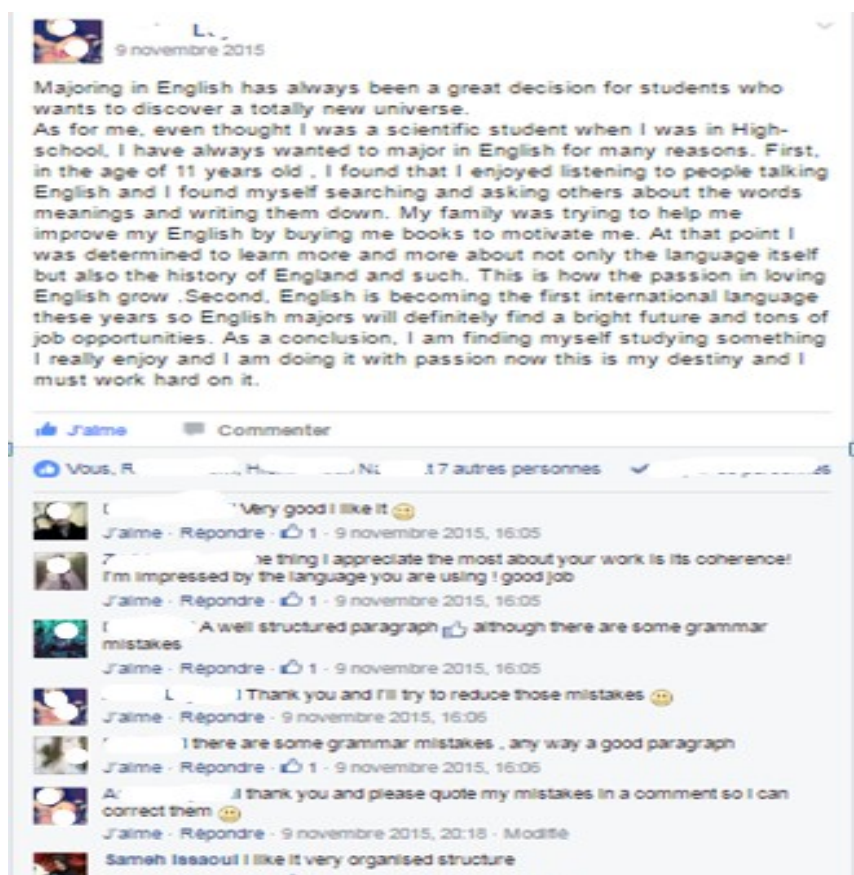
As shown in the above excerpt the discussion was somewhat "superficial and bland" (Mercer, 2011, p.8), with no real challenge of ideas ensuing in the process. Students were mostly unwilling to criticize their peers and preferred to maintain some kind of a group harmony even at the expense of learning, hence the constant repetition and confirmation. Exploratory talk shares characteristics of both disputational and cumulative talk. Although, initially individuals might exhibit a critical posture towards their peers' ideas, their interaction doesn't seem to hinder their cooperation towards the achievement of joint goals. Individual differences are eventually contained and a common ground conducive to collective problem-solving and individual learning is reached through discursive processes. Exploratory talk, as such, seems to be a catalyst to intellectual development. The exchange to follow gives further evidence of such talk:

A: the topic sentence in your paragraph "people can visit Tunisia because of many causes" can be improved

B: why ?? it is correct!

A: the structure of the sentence is but the vocabulary need to be replaced

B: not sure what you mean

C: you can say this for example; there are three main causes that can promote Tunisia as a leading touristic destination...

A: Ye I like this better.

B: How about this: Tunisa is a wonderful place to visit especiallyfor people looking for splendid nature, exotic cuisine and rich culture.

C: good i like it ☺

A: Ok here is my new sentence: Because of its splendid nature, exotic cuisine and rich culture, Tunisia is a wonderful touristic destination.

A: like that

 C: ;) ☺ ;) ☺

The above exchange started with some kind of disagreement where speakers contested each other's ideas. The discussion, however, was not futile. On the contrary, students' comments were constructively critical and proceeded in a rather reasoned and equitable way. Alternative ideas and perspectives were offered and discussions were task-focused. All partners were found to "pool resources, to offer constructive criticism or make suggestions" towards the completion of the task (Mercer 2004, p. 166). As a result, student A decided to paraphrase the topic sentence of the paragraph with no apparent loss of face.

All previously discussed instances are meant to provide samples of the different forms of talk. The quantitative analysis was thought to provide further evidence of the dynamic nature of talk. In accordance with Mercer's (2004) proposed methodology, recurring vocabulary sets associated with distinct talk forms which emerged in the qualitative data were counted. Data was later tabulated for longitudinal comparison. The distribution of those lexical items among initial and final drafts is shown in this table:

Table 2

Key Linguistic Features as Distributed among Different Talk Forms Before and After Revision

Talk form	Key feature	Prompt 1		Prompt 2		Prompt 3	
		Pre	post	pre	post	pre	post
Disputational talk	No	43	36	23	16	28	22
	I don't think	41	44	33	29	27	31
	Not really	24	21	26	19	16	12
	You need	21	13	23	34	26	31
Cumulative talk	Yes	79	84	74	71	63	74
	Good	67	52	38	46	45	41
	like	54	61	46	43	51	56
	I agree	43	35	39	33	41	36
Exploratory talk	Should	76	64	63	54	66	38
	but	45	21	32	18	22	14
	can	53	23	17	11	14	6
	try	34	14	23	8	31	18

Data show that disputational talk for example is characterized by the use of items like no, I don't think, not really, etc. Those items further attest to the differential nature of this kind of discourse. Cumulative talk was found to use key words such as I agree , good, yes, I like , etc. which in turn confirm the uncontested acceptance of ideas. As for exploratory talk words like but, should, but, can and try were very common in the data. Frequencies are informative in that they showcase the development in the relational dynamics among peers. Despite the recurrence of disputational talk in the data across all three assignments, cumulative and, to a greater degree, explorative talk types seem to dominate the discussions. This in itself is an evidence of the collaborative nature of students' interaction. More details about this aspect will be outlined in the next sections.

4.2.1.2 Scaffolding

While Mercer's framework offers a very useful typology of talk emanating in interaction, it seems that his model contended its analysis of types and roles of talk without any reference to the dynamics how these functions unfold. The researcher therefore

thought that a further detailed analysis of the mechanics of talk conducive to learning was needed. To this end, Lantolf & Appel's (1994) scaffolding strategies as well as Wertsh (1979)'s regulation framework were implemented in interpreting the data.

Although students varied in how they scaffolded each other within their ZPD, six scaffolding dynamics emerged, with varying degrees, within the Facebook group interactions. The following table presents the identified episodes as well as some examples from the corpus.

Table 3

Example Scaffolding strategies

Scaffolding strategy	Identified instances	Examples
Recruitment (R)	21	So guys what do you think? Any comments?
Simplifying the task(S)	53	The topic sentence is the sentence you develop throughout the paragraph
Direction Maintenance (DM)	23	What you need to do next is try to think of the examples that you can provide to support causes of violence against women in Tunisia.
Marking Critical Features (MCF)	48	The concluding sentence summarizes all the causes you mentioned. It doesn't add new causes
Frustration Control (FC)	24	I like it . although you can expand more on the financial problems and how they lead to divorce. Keep it up.
Modelling (M)	52	English is "the most powerful"

Worth noting is that because of the illustrative nature of the above sample episodes, distinct scaffolding mechanics were presented separately. Students in reality made use of a combination of the identified strategies. Consider the following example:

In the above excerpt, the student who posted the paragraph was unable to appropriate the cognitive skills necessary to efficiently handle some aspects of the task on her own. She therefore seeks help from her peers. Her discourse is characterized by the recourse to many other-regulatory strategies. The utterance "did I need to add other ideas? Or just to make the T.S clear" is obviously a clarification request about the features of a good topic sentence. Students' comments on their friend's work included various instances of 'negotiation for meaning' moves that intended to promote understanding of the task. Students highlighted what was important to notice using a specific meta-discourse resource, elaborating detail, and, sometimes, marking critical features and discrepancies between what has been produced and the ideal solution (Wood et al., 1976). Following her peers' guidelines, the student was able to improve her understanding of the task and thereby move from her actual stage of development to a potential stage of development (ZPD). Indeed, the student has moved from an other-regulated stage to a more self-regulated stage as evidenced in the

discussion. The confirmation "I just forgot the verb" is another regulatory strategy aimed at showing understanding. The student is now able to recognize her own linguistic shortcomings and initiate revision.

4.2.1.3 Establishing intersubjectivity

Students' interaction has been linked to the establishment of a shared understanding of the task at hand, or what Guerrero and Villamil have identified as the negotiation of intersubjectivity. In their words, intersubjectivity is "the intermental point of fusion at which separate minds come to share a common perspective and an equal degree of commitment to the task (p. 53). With regard to peer collaboration, intersubjectivity can be interpreted as the mutual understanding of the task at hands that can be reached by two or more individuals working jointly. Antón and Dicamilla (1999, p.241) posit that intersubjectivity can be evidenced in the sharing of ideas on a cognitive plane and on the social plane with the exchange of polite utterances which encourage one another in the tasks, by providing a positive learning environment. Both types of intersbjectivity have been discerned in the data. The following excerpt provides a concrete example of how cognitive intersubjectivity unfolds in discussion:

A : your paragraph doesn't have a concluding sentence

B: A concluding sentence to summarize bro

C: Or you can repeat the topic sentence in different words

B: Ye sure but I think summarizing is better since you are leaving the reader with the things to remember

C: Well, I think you're right, I think I'll do that in my paragraph too thanks ☺

Social intersubjectivity is referred to a state where different parteners establish an agreeable working atmosphere (Antón and Dicamilla, 1999). Although the researcher adopted Mercer's typology in analyzing discussion on the Facebook course group, it was believed that Mercer's framework somehow left under discussed a crucial element in language learning namely interpersonal relations. In fact, while Mercer (2000, 2004, 2007) stressed interthinking as a high level of shared understanding of the task at hands, he didn't say much about the atmosphere leading to the establishment of such harmonious

collaboration of effort. He in fact considers cumulative talk any conversational sequence which confirms, repeats or reformulates partners' claims. In this sense, cumulative talk mostly runs in a rather docile posture and allows no room for original ideas to come up. Seen from a different perspective, this talk, however "bland and superficial" might seem, can be a precursor for people to inter-think. No real collaboration, let alone a state of interthinking, can ensue in a digressive working environment where individuals are not at ease. Following Antón and Dicamilla (1999), the researcher thought that analyzing what Mercer dubs 'cumulative talk' with fresh eyes could highlight aspects that went unnoticed in Mercer's framework. A total of 78 utterances of social intersubjectivity were identified. One such exchange is seen below:

> A: So folks, any comment?
>
> B: The three elements of the paragraph are present: TS,SS,CS.
>
> A: Really? I am not sure
>
> C: Yes, you did a good job, I like your style
>
> B: me too ☺
>
> A: Thanks guys I love you

The harmonious nature of this exchange allows students to maintain positivity and thus create a favorable learning environment. Prior to this exchange student A was having doubts about the quality of her paragraph. Her friends' feedback not only reassured her but boosted her self confidence. Although Facebook seems to lack the non-verbal cues such distinguishing face-to-face communication, the site offers a range of options to reflect, in the best possible way, users' different emotional tones. TheFacebook "like" functionality as well as the varied emoticons were found to bestow the confidence of the writer (Walther & D'Addario, 2001). Interestingly, the participants' use of the first language L1 (Arabic) and humor was a remarkable social move to maintain intersubjectivity:

I choose to learn English language for several reasons. First, in my childhood i can't understand untranslated movies.
Second, I really enjoy pouncing english words, reading books and listen to music in its original and untranslated form, which is in most cases more authentic. And songs tend to be better when I can truly understand them. Third, I can be able to manage better abroad. I can speak with confidence and get my message across clearly, instead of hesitating and stamm...
Afficher la suite

👍 J'aime   💬 Commenter

aimez ça.

Afficher 1 autre commentaire

ههههههه انجلترى ولا موش انجلترى يامتعلمين ياينوع المدارس
دا انجليزي دا يا مرسي!

J'aime · Répondre · 👍 2 · 9 novembre, 18:56

Hehehehe I am sorry my friend !!! I am just kidding. It is very kind of you to share with us these nice words
J'aime · Répondre · 👍 1 · 9 novembre, 18:59

I think it will be better if you put the verb "choose" in the simple past form.
J'aime · Répondre · 👍 1 · 9 novembre, 19:04

a repondu · 2 reponses

The witty comments in the above example helped create a congenial atmosphere but at the same time attain further affective involvement in the activity. This is a natural by-product of play in child's learning experience and can equally apply to adults. According to Vygotsky, "What passes unnoticed by the child in real life becomes a rule of behavior in play" (1978, p. 95).

4.3   Interview findings:

The post experiment interviews aimed at gaining an insight into the learners' evaluation of the use of Facebook as an instructional tool. As detailed in the following graph, responses were mostly favorable.

Figure 2 Students' evaluation of the Use of Facebook in Improving their Writing Skills
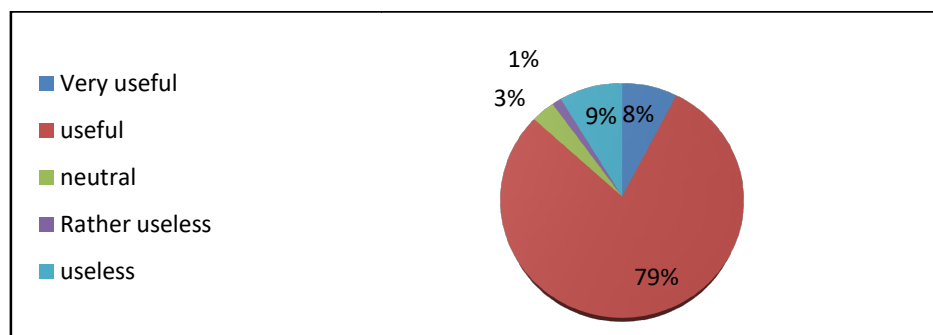
Interview data indicate that over 87% of participants positively evaluate their experience with the course Facebook group. Most respondents identify the Facebook group as a convenient virtual learning environment that allowed them to actively take part in the learning process out of class. All the participants also conjured that Facebook offered them a highly interactive and personalized learning experience they couldn't get in otherwise traditional provisions.

The second section of the interview sought to identify specific areas of improvement in learners writing. Participants positively evaluate their experience with the Facebook online writing group. According to them, Facebook assisted them in enhancing the quality of their paragraphs. 88.6% of the informants confirm that the site spelling checker functionality helped them improve their spelling. 85% of the interviewees confirm that reading their friends' posts (whether paragraphs, comments or extra links) gave them a better idea of the topic they are writing on. The site was equally felt to enhance their paragraph structure, unity and coherence. Students similarly find that using Facebook helped them to reduce grammar mistakes including tense, pronouns, prepositions, etc...Worth noting is the fact that these findings corroborate earlier findings that emerged from the grades assigned to different scaling subcategories by the raters. Interestingly, there is a mismatch between the interviewees' evaluation of the progress they made in mechanics and their obtained scores in this subcategory.

The last section of the interview aimed at investigating the challenges participants may have encountered while using the Facebook group. The researcher intentionally used open-ended questions so as to offer the opportunity to express their minds freely. Students pointed out to a number of challenges. A reiterated concern that emerged in the data related to the possibility of   being easily distracted by other Facebook features such as

instant messaging, etc... Indeed, 34% of participants claimed it was really hard for them to stay on task. A student explains that "I visit the Facebook group page every day, I spend a long time reading what other students write, I sometimes visit their profiles, look at pictures, watch videos..I do not write.." she comments. The asynchronous nature of Facebook posed yet another problem for some interviewees. Indeed, the lack of spontaneity that sometimes occurs in the Facebook group setting due to time lags and slow responses, in comparison with the classroom setting where discussions take place on the spot. Some found that peer feedback was sometimes felt to be irrelevant. Many peer comments overemphasized the mistakes rather the strengths of their work. This in turn had a counter effect on the students' confidence and willingness to share their work on the site.

4.4 Discussion of the findings

The present study aimed at exploring the affordances of a newly-emerging technology, namely Facebook in the instruction of L2 writing. Starting from the conviction that learners' beliefs have a major influence on their learning to the extent that they may "hold sway over their motivations, attitudes and learning" (Cotterall, 1999, p 511), the aim of the pre-experiment questionnaire was to explore the perception of a group of Tunisian EFL learners about the potentiality of Facebook as a learning tool. Questionnaire results were overall very favorable. Students showed a very positive attitude as to the potentiality of Facebook in language learning in general and in enhancing their writing skills in particular. Students felt that the site's varied functionalities can promote autonomous learning as they can access the site at their convenience. Moreover, the majority of the respondents concurred that they perceive Facebook as a learning tool. Indeed, they seem to have already put in place a variety of strategies to strike a balance between their social and academic goals. This is yet another staggering proof that pedagogies are lagging behind, hence the need to revisit established teaching methods to accommodate a twenty-first century internet literati who seem to be no longer content with traditional provisions. The findings of the questionnaire in this respect are consistent with previous research (Bosch, 2009;McCarthy, 2012; Irwin et al., 2012; VanDoorn and Eklund,2013). Most studies quoted show that students have a great appreciation of technology-enhanced learning. It seems

therefore wise to leverage this favorable attitude in developing teaching methodologies that cater to students' needs and preferences.

The questionnaire equally gleaned important data regarding students who still have doubts about the effectiveness of social media in language teaching. Despite its undeniable influence on major national and international domains(politics in particular), some students still associate Facebook and social media in general to relaxed, fun activities and find it hard to perceive the site as a formal instructional interface. This finding is in line with previous research which confirms that Facebook is still widely contested in certain academic contexts (Cassidy 2006).Moreover, a number of students expressed concerns about the amalgamation of public and private domains. Interestingly, VanDoorn and Eklund (2013) proclaim that "In terms of disadvantages, the principal issue identified by the students was the blurring of "social"and "educational" domains, together with privacy concerns"(p.10).

In Facebook's defense, the skepticism about its effectiveness might have emanated from the novelty of this learning modality. The majority of the participants in this research have never used Facebook as a learning support before. Additionally, students are historically used to conventional teaching and immediate interaction with teachers; they therefore tend to resist change. It is hoped that humble initiatives like this could change the hearts of the detractors. Moreover, with the new advances in the site, privacy issues can now be dispelled by a simple click. Participants can alter their privacy settings in such a way that no other user can see their private photos, videos or statuses. Moreover, following Munoz and Towner's (2009) suggestion, in this research students were given the choice to use either their regular Facebook account or start a new one. This measure was thought to enhance the privacy of the participants and boost their confidence.

The experimental phase of this research presented an opportunity forstudents to transcend the barriers of time and space and enjoy an interactive, learner-centered, and personalized learning experience. The facebook group allowed the participants to lose their passive role of by-standers waiting for the teacher to give them instructions and solutions and venture in a self-initiated learning experience. Students' paragraphs posted on the site before and after the revision are instances of new possibilities open to a group of learners

with very limited opportunities for language practice and use outside the classroom. The progress made across prompts attests to the effectiveness of the site in enhancing their writing skills. And, however minor the progress might look, we as educators should welcome any opportunity for students to practice writing since, as Swain has aptly postulated in her "Output Hypothesis" (1985), "the act of producing language(speaking and writing) constitutes, under certain circumstances, part of the process of second language learning" (Swain 2005, p. 471).In fact, she explains :"output may stimulate learners to move from the semantic, open-ended non-deterministic, strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production. Output, thus, would seem to have a potentially significant role in the development of syntax and morphology" (Swain 1995, p.128).

The interaction on the Facebook discussion board is yet another compelling empirical support in favor of the effectiveness of Facebook in sustaining collaborative learning. Students' interaction was found to help students scaffold each other, mitigating the difficulty of the task along the way. Eventually, students were able to move from their actual developmental level as determined by their unassisted efforts to a higher developmental zone.

Although it is widely acknowledged that it was Vygotsky who laid the foundation for the interactionist view of language acquisition, the importance of dialogic interaction has been documented elsewhere in the literature. Long's hypothesis(1996) for instance, although originally devised to account for interaction ensuing between native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs), seems to pay as much heed to the importance of conversation in language learning. In fact, Long (1996) posits that conversation gives room for "negotiation for meaning" and "triggers interactional adjustments" which "facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways" (p 452).

The post-experiment interviews aimed at gaining an insight into students' evaluation of the use of the writing course Facebook group. Interview results indicate that The Face book interface was found to foster students' motivation and autonomous learning. The site was equally believed to accommodate and sustain both individualized and group learning.

As for their writing skill, students confirm they made significant improvement in different namely content, vocabulary, language use, organization and mechanics.

While the use of Facebook as an adjunct to traditional L2 writing provision can conceivably enhance students' motivation and foster collaborative learning, some students expressed their skepticism about the effectiveness of the feedback provided by their peers. In their view, their classmates were more prone to comment on minor mistakes and neglect more important aspects. Another disadvantage that came up in the data is the risk to be easily distracted. Some students claimed that it wasn't easy for them to stay on task given the multitude of features on the site.

All the above mentioned concerns purportedly challenge the effectiveness of Facebook as an educational tool. Interestingly the exact same indictment of peer-feedback has been voiced elsewhere in the literature despite the significant differences across studies in their context and research design. In her summary of previous research on students' attitudes towards various forms of feedback, Ferris (2002) concluded that students clearly favor teacher feedback, whether written or oral (p. 114). A similar conclusion was reached by Tsui and Ng (2000) about secondary school EFL learners' preferences for feedback in Hong Kong. The researchers found that students have a special 'reverence' for teacher feedback. In their view, the teacher is the best qualified to provide suitable comments. Unlike peer feedback, teacher feedback is felt to be unbiased and well-targeted. Taras (2003), in a similar vein, noted that in contexts where language teaching is heavily teacher-centered, students have been conditioned to ascribe a particularly high status to teachers' words and perceive them as the highest authority in class.

But students' preferences regarding feedback have never been firm or stand still in favor of a position or against another. Indeed, attitudes about peer-feedback have been swinging back and forth like a pendulum and conflicting opinions about the matter have been documented in the literature. Belaid (2004), for example, carried out a research on the attitudes of Tunisian university students towards peer- and self- feedback on the written texts. She concluded that students appreciated and benefited more from peer- and self-feedback on "early drafts" and teacher-feedback on "later drafts" (p282).

All the above-cited studies attest to the varied feedback preferences, it can therefore be concluded that the different opinions registered in this study are part of the diversity in judgment not as a disadvantage of Facebook per-se. The researcher however endorses the position that learners have to receive some adequate training in order to be able to offer more constructive feedback (Belaid, 2004; Min, 2006).

The interview yielded another challenge namely that of time lag in getting feedback. Part of the design of this study involved encouraging interaction at convenience, i.e. students were not required to be online at the same time. This was believed to motivate learners get more involved in this research. A study with a different design can certainly overcome this shortcoming thanks to the instant messaging option on Facebook.Finally, some students confirm that they run the risk to be distracted easily.The findings of this research on this matter are congruent with previous research (Faudree , 2009; Wise et al., 2011; Bani-Hani et al., 2014).Bani-Hani et al. (2014) caution that free games on Facebook for example can lead to procrastination and could eventually undermine students' attention". They therefore stress raising students' awareness about "the importance of self-reliance and initiative in terms of choosing material to introduce to other members of the Facebook group as well as preventing themselves from becoming distracted by other features of Facebook (p.32).

5. Conclusion

The rapid growth of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) has certainly brought about unprecedented changes to language teaching and learning, hence the call for a paradigm shift that accommodates the needs of a new generation of "digital natives" (Prensky, 2111). Interestingly, this twenty-first century plea to go along the line of modernity is deeply rooted in the claims that Vygotsky made decades ago. His prophecy that learning is context-bound has stood the test of time and proved instrumental in varied contexts. Within this futuristic vision of learning, this research endeavored to explore the effects of implementing an innovative instructional procedure featuring a combination of face-to-face and online provisions. Results show that Facebook procures great potential in language teaching and learning. Yet, just like any other teaching tool, the site has a few challenges which need to be addressed to reach optimum results.

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The Rhetorics of Violence in Jalila Baccar and Fadhel Jaïbi's *Violence*(*s*)

By Rafika Zahrouni

Abstract

Based on rhetorics of violence and discourses of gender supported by the theoretical works of Pierre Bourdieu, A. Ballinger, and Bertolt Brecht, this article first investigates the concept of violence through the performance of Jalila Baccar and Fadhel Jaïbi's*Violence(s)* (2015).In this play an examination of the new forms of violence helps us pay particular attention to violence enacted by men and women against their minoritized groups, and how, when harmed, these groups go against the grain. My purpose in this article is to demonstrate how such forms of violence appeal to the audiences' emotions and intellect. A Brechtian reading of *Violence(s)*with reference to *Tsunami* (2013) and *Fear(s)* (2017), also by Baccar and Jaïbi will assist comprehension of the development of violence and the resulting frustration provoked by the Arab Spring's ongoing political, ethnic, economic, and religious conflicts and its subsequent impact on the Arab citizen's daily behaviours and attitudes.

Violence is a recurring theme which has attracted attention since the Greek classical theatre. The development of violence has always been connected to emotions of frustration and sufferings, which gave birth to tragedies. Central to the cathartic effect is the theme of violence whose timeless lure and validity explain why it was recreated in the Elizabethan drama. Invoking violence, notably through Shakespearean tragedies revolve around aspects of violence, including revenge, combat, murder, betrayal, and several types of conflicts which are threatening only to enhance the Aristotelian idea of "poetic justice". As stated in Clifford Leech's *Tragedy* "Macbeth is lured by the equivocations of the devil to make his own perdition sure."Leech, further, explains the idea of merit, illustrating how the death of Hamlet is justified by an act of murder; that is of killing Claudius.

In modern times and as the traditional higher order becomes less important if it has not disappeared altogether, theatrical productions have moved away from classical tragedy to a newer form of drama that tackles concepts of violence differently. At the turn of the century, misfortunes of our modern time fit within the broader political and socioeconomic contexts. In the context of the Tunisian theatre, particularly, Jalila Baccar and Fadhel Jaïbi's theatrical productions the post-Arab's ongoing conflicts and their subsequent impacts on the Arab citizen's daily behaviour and attitudes form the central dramatists' concern. Although recognizable preoccupation with social and political criticism is inherent in most of Baccar and Jaïbi's theatrical representations, the theme of violence is an essential component of their preoccupation in terms of types, agency and responsibility. In this vein, the present paper aims to demonstrate how Baccar and Jaïbi's drama is capable of accommodating new contexts of violence in connection with the tastes of modern audience.

I turn to a number of antecedent works and critics on different types of violence—verbal, psychological, cognitive, physical, sexual, operational or experiential—to illuminate the violence trope I am studying in the 2015 performance *Violence*(*s*), which premiered in Milan at Piccolo Teatro. In portraying a number of female and male characters as violent, both theatre director Jaïbi and playwright / actress Baccar have constructed several stories about women and men, entangled in discourses of politics, culture and gender associated with violence, leading to creative representations that question the structure of—and

reasons for— violence. Violence, depicted in earlier plays found expression in the political discourse it contested. It is in such a context that the parts of the charactersWassila and Laith, two representatives of the police force in *Khamsūn*(Fifty, 2006)were woven to represent the Tunisian police state violence, whereby any political dissidents were routinely jailed. This pre-revolutionTunisian playmarkedpolitical conditions over the span of fifty years following the Independence of Tunisia (1956-2006) from colonization by France.

Khamsūn, in particular, held up a mirror to the Tunisian society in which staging all forms of violence inflicted onthe rebellious types of characters was the meanstoenforce them into conformity.

The violent character type in *Violence*(*s*) depicts women and men's struggle in an increasingly aggressive society. As I will explore in this article, *Violence*(*s*) not only aims at increasing people's awareness of the changing social conditions in Tunisia, but it also provides fresh insights into the politics of gender, inciting controversy against the prevailing views concerning gender expectations. In this play, performers Fatma Ben Saidane and Aymen Mejriappear as subjectsand/or objects of violence.In reference to the important roles these characters portrayed in *Violence*(*s*), I will argue that the so-called victims should not be merely regarded as born victimized but rather as subversive characters able to harm their disadvantaged minority groups, such as groups of women and homosexuals giving way to new patterns of violence different from the stereotypical picture of violence meted out against these groups. My objective in this article is to reveal the dynamics of aggression under the impact of a new post-revolution social reality in Tunisia.

Based on rhetorics of violence anddiscourses of gender supported by thetheoretical works of Pierre Bourdieu, A. Ballinger, and Bertolt Brecht,this article will first investigate the concept of violence, showing how this is a complicated concept and how the performance of *Violence(s)*represents a new cultural and political context in which various types of violence co-occur. The present article is, too, able to proffer a challenge to established views about violence due to the changing perceptions of violence against

women and men. An examination of the new forms of violence helps us pay particular attention to violence enacted by men and women against their minoritized groups, and how, when harmed, these groups go against the grain. An examination of violence will help us understand how the new social reality in Tunisia is able to produce violence against old and new forms of gender practices, leading to the undermining of human development. My purpose in this article is to demonstrate how such forms of violence appeal to the audiences' emotions and intellect, in which context a Brechtian reading of the play will assist comprehension of how the representation of violence succeeds in increasing the audiences' sensitivity to the current situation of violence in Tunisia through the use of alienation techniques and, yet, artistically transgresses the wounds inflicted by violence.

Key words: violence, gender, subversion, masculinicide, agency and responsibility, alienation, trivialized violence

Baccar and Jaïbi's *Violence*(*s*) tells a multifaceted story of crime through five violence-centered stories in both private and public spaces and in both heterosexual and homosexual partnerships in a fragmented non-linear structure. Each story represents a specific type of violence from the perspective of a male or female character. Yet, the dominant type fits in physical gender-based violence, with emphasis on symbolic and psychological violence. At the opening of the play, the character Lobna Mlika who appears on stage to visit her incarcerated friend Fatma, puts her hand to her nose to seemingly block some repelling smell, which establishes an atmosphere of suspense relating to upcoming scenes suggesting both suffocation and rottenness. The theatre space itself reinforces themes of trial, sorrow, sadness, crime, and cruelty. Against the effect of the almost entirely bare stage stand the high, dark, thick and grey walls in the 4ème Art, a theatre located on Paris Avenue in Tunis. In this locus, the greyness of costumes invokes a gruesome atmosphere, which accentuates a tone of aggression and cruelty, one which pervades the play from beginning to end. It is only through the disrupted nature of the scenes that the essence of violence gain potential. The fragmented non-linear structure of the play strikingly mirrors the increasing

disintegration of the Tunisian society.

The atmosphere of fragmentation, aggression and cruelty has preoccupied scholars in all societies. In fact, like anthropologist Neil L. Whitehead(2004) recognizes, most researchers in his field "agree on one thing—that violence is pervasive, ancient, infinitely various, and a central fact of human life, but also that its prevalence is poorly understood in general" (p. 55).Because the Tunisian society, which is my focus, suffers from violence exacerbated by the socio-political changes, scholars including Raoudha Kammoun (2013) focused on verbal violence involving men and women in the public context. From a linguistic perspective informing her investigation of the use of vulgar language in Tunisia, Kammoun demonstrated how the Tunisian society has undergone a profound social change, the outcome of which is the increasing degree of coarse speech used by men and women alike. It is in the context of holding up the theatrical mirror to observe how our society is enduring drastic changes— especially after the radical political uprisings of the year 2011— and of rethinking the motives that are causing major types of violence to be on the increasethat this performance *Violence(s)* is born.

The story unfolds with the gathering of the key protagonists Fatma, Lobna and Jalila while they are incarcerated in prison, apparently awaiting trial. Among the driving forces to commit crimes in *Violences*is vengeance due to verbal and physical violence. For example, the scene in which actress Lobna Mlika interrogates students to discover how vengeful they are toward their philosophy teacher may be considered as one of the best scenes in dramatizing violence. Twoother crucial scenes display how (Fatma Ben Saidane) is vengeful toward her husband (Houssine) and how, at a different stage, she acts vengefully against her son (Hamma). Moreover, violence is portrayed through a complex scene in which a male lover (Aymen Mejri) murders his recent politician boyfriend Iskander. Vengeance is not physical only, as shown through the incarceration of the theatre lover (Jalila Baccar), who interestingly wants to avenge the theatre institution by, sarcastically, critiquing the indifference of the Tunisian government toward the restoration of the theatre building, particularly its broken window located at the artists' entrance. Indeed, all characters are confined in a shared space, but each individual is detained under suspicion for having

committed a different crime.

In this prison, the detainees are receiving therapy provided by their psychotherapist Lobna. The story of Fatma unfolds when Lobna reminds her that Houssine died, and yet

Fatma insists that it was the cab driver who died when she had to fight with him on the road at the traffic lights. Fatma recounts that she was   car when the cab driver reversed and crashed into her car. Subsequently, she reports to Lobna that she was enraged at him, calling him "a blind man" and asked him for the reason why he did not open his eyes sufficiently to see the rear lights of her vehicle. Fatma added that the cab driver was also extremely furious and promised to immediately come and crush her just as lice could be crushed between one's nails. Fatma, further, reported that the cab driver got out of his car and grabbed the jack, but as soon as he attempted to hit the woman's head she snatched the tool out of his hands and instead it was his head that received fatal blows. Fatma elucidated that murdering the cab driver was indeed an act of self-defense for being a victim of sexual harassment. Fatma's concern for her "dead" husband Houssine causes Lobna to immediately realize that the former is in denial.

As such, the audiences encounter the double story of Fatma not only as narrated by Fatma in the first-person, but also as recounted by Lobna who reminds Fatma that she is the perpetrator of the killing of her husband Houssine, rather than the cab driver. Lobna provides a detailed account, specifying that Fatma crushed her husband's head, using the jack. The murder case helps the audiences broach questions about the reasons people commit crime. By dramatizing masculinicide, the dramatists may have also meant to remove misconceptions of a recurrent form of violence on account of gender; that is to say femicide. Such masculinicide is not investigated in the play, for the audience to understand the reasons why a wife would kill her husband. While the atrocious act shows that women like Fatma may retaliate against their husband in the cruelest of ways, it does not provide any explanation for the crime except that Lobna clarifies how Fatma commits murder when she fails to park her car in the garage due to finding the car of her husband already parked

there, horizontally. The nebulous and unreliable reasons as to why Fatma decided to murder her husband are reinforced by means of portraying this character in denial. Fatma seems to have lost her memory, which impedes any act of interrogation from shedding light on the real reasons behind the crime. In doing so, the dramatists Baccar and Jaibi help the audience rethink violence as a concept that is culturally conceptualized in terms of its being commonly wreaked by males more than females.

Implicitly, however, the dramatists raise an important question about violence in terms of responsibility and agency. In addition to the sociological approach that aims to account for the contribution of females to domestic violence, Fatma's later scene in which she plays the role of a twelve-year-old child being violent toward a cat sensitizes the audience to the psychological factor that contributed to the character's adult criminal activity. The scene examines the psychology of this persona, drawing on an influential childhood memory in regard to a cat that she tortured. The consequences of the child's nightmare for which, perhaps, the character-actress Fatma Ben Saidane never came to fully forgive herself add a psychological aspect to violence, marking the line separating the character's real self from her stage self, which became less clear the deeper that actress Fatma Ben Saidane immersed herself into the character Fatma. The psychological dimension adds to the scene further complexity that blurs any understanding of whether the violent behaviour committed by Fatma is intentional or unintentional in nature.

Indeed, not only Fatma but also the character of Aymen Mejri exhibited cruelty toward animals during his childhood and, akin to her, he proved to be a murderer in adulthood. The incorporation of a psychological motive complicates the question of violence and responsibility and, further, the debate on whether violence may be in part rooted in remote childhood acts related to pain, and thus triggering vengeance when the time arises. By staging Aymen's act of torturing a martlet, the dramatists Baccar and Jaïbi conveyed how the psychological impact of any given repressed emotions might lead to violent and criminal activities, especially when the unconscious remains repressed for some years. A

thorough investigation of Aymen's act of murdering his boyfriend in the bathtub is presented in the context of an interrogation of Aymen by a representative of the state police force, Noomen Hamda who was, ironically, playing a card game with Aymen. The game, on another occasion, aims at reinforcing disenchantment. Aymen's story is understood in the context of revenge against his boyfriend's decision to condemn homosexuality and opt, instead, for heterosexuality. The story, additionally, highlights the Tunisian dominant state discourse with regard to homosexuality, portraying the desire to fit in the herd and shirk any fight against the cultural or more specifically the sexual codes of conduct. Avoid transgressing any moral values tuned to the religion of Islam and conforming to established codes of social and religious behavior has ultimately, therefore, cost Aymen's ex-boyfriend his life.

Aymen's atrocious behavior not only displays how the character is out of control and that the psychological repression mechanism no longer acted to protect him from his ego, but also how, in the context of sociocultural and political changes, gender and sexual orientation are now out voiced characteristics sweeping the Tunisian society. Aymen's boyfriend's choice of heterosexuality is not random; rather it reflects the impact of a political choice mingled with religiosity as a vehicle of change within the Tunisian society in the last decades. Aymen's story illustrates this change through revealing how his boyfriend was restrained by a resurgence of religiosity among the Tunisian youth.

The murder scene, thus, reinforces the idea that in Tunisia while people expect that social change is about to happen ideals of freedom, including that of sexual orientation, are rebounding due to religious antagonism and political interests. The murder of Aymen's ex-boyfriend underlines a conflict that has recently been scything through the Tunisian society and its political, religious and cultural forces. The scene displays how, despite the political change since the 2011 Revolution and the aspiration for democracy, in practice people show concern for freedom, especially of choice for one's partner. This concern for freedom is understood in the context of religiosity, which remains a significant vital force with the power to change people's lives while, for others, violence becomes the sole form of expression to impose their own ideologies without restraints. Amid these conflicts, the

question of agency and responsibility in regard to violence functions as a leitmotif throughout the play's performance.

As a way of researching the issue of agency and responsibility, this section commences with a discussion of the reasons why women kill in a global context. Scholar in criminology and victimology, Anette Ballinger who analysed domestic violence in England and Wales (1900-65), discussed how women who kill are not considered responsible or rational, nor do they gain agency in respect of what she dubbed "the Phallocentric law" (Ballinger, 2005, p. 67). The author argues that in defending battered women, for instance, a law that justifies criminal females' acts in terms of suffering from battered woman syndrome is, indeed, inadequate. I borrow from Ballinger's debate on gender and punishment, the need to re-interpret Woman's act of violence without sacrificing responsibility and rationality and without forgetting the institution of marriage and its role in the conservation of the gendered social order with unchallenged abusive men and discriminations integral to relations between men and women. Looking at mentally disturbed females who are both subjects and agents of violence in *Violence(s)*invites audiences to reflect not solely on the wider gender-based social contexts in which murder is committed, but also on the new socio-political discourses. As will be demonstrated, this new historical reality imbued with violence is represented in *Violence(s)* through several dramatic techniques that are meant to increase the audiences' awareness of the emerging psychological and political contexts responsible for the motives underlying violence.

In *Violences* the line between the character and its double is drawn by means of a variety of techniques including the use of doubling, significant props, intertextuality, code-switching and by fusing the bizarre to the comic and tragic elements. I start with doubling, which may be illustrated when an actor occupies more than one role. This technique makes use of real-life names. For instance, the dramatists rely on the audiences' familiarity with actresses Jalila Baccar, Fatma ben Saidane and Lobna Mlika by naming them, accordingly, as Jalila, Fatma and Lobna. In this performance, the actor-character relationship is further

conveyed by means of other methods such as using third-person instead of first person pronouns. Such techniques exemplify distanciation literally out loud.

Most importantly, in *Violence(s)*, as a theatrical technique, distanciation serves to raise concerns about violence through performing new roles by the same actor, which lies in deconstructing a series of status quo situations. For example, the audiences soon recognize the character Fatma in a different role than that of the wife of Houssine, the man who she murdered. In this doubling function, Fatma played the role of a mother named Zohra, who has shoved her son Hamma into a hot bread oven. When interrogated by the police— Noomen Hamda in charge of interrogation in the company ofthe note-taking actress Lobna Mlika (also in a different role)— this monster-like mother-character (Fatma ben Saidane) explains why she poisoned, then burnt her son. In a tragicomic tone, the mother reveals how she could no longer tolerate her abusive son as he was continuously beating her up and compromising her integrity by pushing her toward prostitution. Suffering violence at the hands of her son, she returned violence against him, which makes the mother-son relationship along with the image of femininity a disturbing one, meant to create the distanciation effect by keeping audiences in a state of doubt as to whetherthey should identify with the mother Zohra or feel pity for Hamma, the son, instead.

What is more significant in this particular scene is the subversion of the object of violence. Audiences' expectations are countered upon watching male and female characters as both perpetrators and victims of violence. Such is the case of Zohra who recounted the violence she suffered at the hands of her delinquent son. By murdering Hamma, Zohra subverts the experience of a battered woman due to a dysfunctional filial relationship, administering a deadly blow to him and, thus, depriving him of any further opportunity to terrorize her. The process of punishing Hamma is described in minute details by the mother during the interrogation. Zohra seems to have freed herself of her son's violence by first poisoning his food to witness him perish, then by shoving his body in a fire place, enjoying

the fire's work as it consumes his body. The story of Zohra complicates the theme of violence in its relation to the leitmotif, responsibility and agency. The scene in question arguably hints at blaming violence upon the institution of family and to attribute violence to the family's failure to instil good values. Violence may thus be understood as a concept that serves to understand how the role of the family in general and the mother in particular may, under given circumstances, be compromised. The murderous act in this particular scene is a warning to the consequences of a social epidemic to suggest that the danger is being rooted in the family. The scene does not elucidate why violence is dominant within the framework of the new social familial reality in Tunisia to the extent that family is no longer safe, especially because the mother figure no longer embodies the affectionate, caring, and loving role.

The alienating effect is further achieved through the use of glass that stands atop a table serving as a means to keep distance between characters each sitting each on one side as if to stress unclarity, division, fragility and obstruction. When actors regard one another through the glass, they have to blow to remove the dust from the surface so that they see each other clearly. Unlike a mirror that is a recurrent trope in literature, usually used for the purpose of reflecting a hidden reality or to express fragility, in this performance the dusty glasshas a further developedvariety of functions. Keeping the actors at a distance by means of a large piece of glass set in the middle of a table aims to separate each pair of characters each time they have a conversation. In an exchange of messages via a social media website, I interacted with scholar and actress Marwa Mannaï who, in addition, served as the director's assistant in *Violence(s)*, and was able to respond to my query with regard to the use of glass on stage. I quote from the online communication I had with Mannaï: "The glass came very literally at first to mean the prison glass separation between the inmates and their visitors." Mannaï added that, among other functions, the glass represents a mirror. Like Mannaï, I find the mirror to have an eclectic use, among these a means to express oddity.

One striking example is that on more than one occasion, Jalila Baccar seems to make use of the glass as if it were a mirror to reflect her application of lipstick amid the dramatic context of incarceration— a behavior that reinforces the doubling and defamiliarisation effect. Such appearance allows the character to remain at a marked distance from the prison in which she is condemned, and invites the audience to investigate the subject that particular behavior and objects represent. Following the epic theatre style, the audience should make an intellectual enquiry about all alienation –Verfremdung—forms taking place on stage, which come through narration. Baccar's unusual behaviour may be interpreted as a sign of commodification as she is reduced to a mere image.

The aesthetic quality of the lipstick, also, reveals how, sarcastically, the inmate is indifferent to her status in prison. In other words, wearing lipstick is meant to trivialize violence. I borrow the concept of trivialized violence from scholars Ann-Karina, Henriksen, and Torbenfeldt B.(2018) who consider this concept as "a theoretical contribution to cultural and narrative criminology research concerned with the everyday experiences of living with violence."Trivialized violence applies to this particular scene and makes it powerful in the sense that it shows how Baccar, in performing almost a mute role, is also representing the acrimonious reality of violence. Her bitter muteness looking through the glass, which in this case is not aimed at viewing something like beauty or ugliness, leaves, indeed, some gaps for the spectators to fill in, increasing the mood of disenchantment.

The oddity of using makeup in the abovementioned scene additionally helps us in expanding on the use of a key prop; the glass, which might be better understood in correlation with clearing the dust from it to establish communication via eye contact between characters. The dust symbolises a lack of transparency in communication, emblematic of a certain blockage that the characters have faced due to one dilemma or another. The attempt of each character to clean the glass of dust conveys how they are in need of a clear vision not just to know the other but also the self or the fractured self; another reality that is so hard to fathom. It is as if this fascinating instrument that the glass

represents is a symbol for "a necessary opposition of forces dividing man from man and man from himself." (Leech, 1969, p. 23). In such a different context, Leech does not evoke the glass prop, but he discusses how tragedy has been used in the twentieth century as a way to describe the world and how the change of philosophical approach to the tragic sense of life gained new interpretations with nineteenth-century philosophers, among them Nietzshe and Hegel. Informed by such authors, Leech explains how the tragic sense extends beyond the concept of "poetical justice." The emphasis on the evil side of man is what I take from the new attitudes of such philosophers who posit that all men exist in an evil situation. *Violence(s)* exemplifies best such evil situations within characters to the extent that characterization is scarcely observed among a spectrum from good to evil.

The character Fatma, for instance, faces glass and recounts her story of murdering a cat during her childhood, an event that embodies how deeply she is trapped in evil situations. Tapping into her childhood is powerful in creating a context that suggests why she had murdered her husband Houssine. The multiple meanings of glass, together with removing dust, are open to a myriad of interpretations that go beyond the conventional usage of glass. The main function of this glass is, therefore, to expose a new reality rather than reflect the same reality of each character that faces it. Indeed, the uncommon use of the glass helps the reader penetrate the essence of the self and to discover how alienated each character is.

In addition to elements that reinforce oddity, code-switching is another important distanciation technique that consists of the practice of moving back and forth between standard Arabic and the Tunisian dialect. This is an odd practice if we consider that Tunisians are familiar with code-switching that occurs more often in daily conversations, which depend on mixing French and Arabic as part of the Tunisian dialect. In the opening scene, for instance, unfamiliarity is tapped in to when Fatma asks Lobna about her husband Houssine, using the term, "Zawji" instead of "Rajli." The standard Arabic version of the equivalent translation for "my husband" adds unfamiliarity to the scene and creates humor to evoke strangeness in different ways. When asked how she is doing, Fatma's response to Lobna finds expression in that coarse terminology, "like shit" which is a recurrent

expression in the bold theatre of Jaïbi and Baccar that is used to denote trouble. It is, thus, due to the alteration between languages, the multiplicity of roles and the interconnections among the present and past plays in terms of violence as well as in the intermingling of obscene and tragic elements that the audiences are discouraged from sympathizing with characters.

The alienation is reinforced by means of oddity, added to the interaction of both comic and tragic elements, making the audience alternate between extremes of emotions of pity leading to psychological cleansing through these emotions and uncontrolled laughter that escapes from irony of speech or from a situation despite the obscure context of violence. When in the opening scene, for instance, Lobna opens her bag the audiences note that there are disparate objects including an orange, a book, with a single shoe. The incongruity between these objects inside a handbag portrays how oddity is important to prevent identification with characters on the one hand, and how the new reality in Tunisia, especially after 2011, is as chaotic as the elements contained in that handbag.

The scene suggests that it is the modern audience that can return the fragmented reality to some semblance of order, and this is in Brecht's conception of theatre only possible by means of reasoning, critiquing and, perhaps, acting. Indeed, *Violence(s)* shows how Baccar and Jaibi's original position is consistent with this Brechtian concept despite its limitations. Arousing the capacity for acting in the audience remains too far-fetched a goal, but stimulating the intellectual attitude in the audience to rethink the nature of violence and draw logical links between post-revolution new historical reality in Tunisia and the rise of violence, is altogether reinforced throughout *Violence(s)* as well as other post-revolutionplays of Jaïbi and Baccar, notably *Tsunami*(2013)[i]and *Fear(s)* (2017).

While *Tsunami* depicted the political turmoil and the danger of extreme forms of Jihadi Salafism, *Fear(s)* yields an insight to a representation of fear when the survival instinct becomes the only drive for the survivors of a dust storm to decide how much cautious they should be with the food they have. The dramatists use the dust storm metaphor to portray the harsh reality lived by scouts when facing their ultimate death due

to shortage of water and food. The play revealed what the Tunisians have become after the Revolution, what emotions they experience, and the ways they interact with others.

The play revealed how when met with the harsh reality, the high ideals of the scouts could only turn to shattered dreams. The dust storm represents the new harsh political, socioeconomic, and religious reality through which the Tunisian society is passing and fighting its way out of it. The atmosphere of disintegration is revisited in *Fear(s)* as everything becomes emblematic of disorder, loss, and nothingness. People live with the fear to die helped to achieve self-discoveries of their evil side and to come to understand how life has become absurd, especially due to conflicts over leadership.

In *Fear(s)* the storm replicates the outcome of unending political conflicts that have shaped different behaviour in post-revolution Tunisia. In Contemporary Tunisia, the politics mingle with the sociocultural life, provoking all types of violence. For instance, several free-thinking intellectuals as well a number of leading politicians started to face death threatsdue to the rise of religious extremism. For his progressivist ideas of Islam and critical ideas of Islamic law or Sharī‘ah, author Mohamed Talbi was threatened of murder before he died in 2017. This is one of the many examples of death threats due to the rise of violence in post-revolution Tunisia. But who is most to blame is the question that the dramatists posit without necessarily providing solutions.

In *Violence(s)*the question of agency and responsibility is revisited at a certain point when the audiences do not know who to blame; the family, the individual, or the new politics shaping the lives of individuals and families. It is worth noting that the family in *Violence(s)* is not the sole environment where violence thrives in post-revolution Tunisia. Jaïbi's play also represents symbolic violence through the story of the character Jalila who seems to be incarcerated for obscure reasons. Infuriated by the fact that a window in the National Theatre of Tunis remained broken for many years, the character symbolically points to dysfunctionality in the theatrical institution as being representative of some possible encroachment on artistic freedom of expression and on empowering the theatre in general. Exerting violence by breaking the window and leaving it shattered for years

metaphorically explains why the character is accustomed to the place in which she is confined to the extent that she refuses to accept liberty when granted a presidential pardon. I draw on the concept of Bourdieu's symbolic violence to explain how sometimes confinement becomes preferable to freedom.

The sociologist Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as "a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling" (Bourdieu, 2001, p.2). Interestingly, Jalila's approval of non-physical violence seems to reveal how the society becomes hellish to the level that an incarcerated individual retreats from society and sacrifices freedom, where the lack thereof appears as natural. Symbolic violence is, thus, exerted on the character, but is only possible with her collaboration due to its subtlety.

In the same context, playing the part of a lawyer, Fatma Ben Saidane visited Jalila in prison and offered her a red flower, but Jalila ate the flower and spat it out as a symbol of rejecting hope as well as an expression of disenchantment. Instead of appreciating the rose, Jalila shoves it in her mouth to, immediately, spit it out onto the stage. The character's animalistic behaviour is supported by the representation of characteristics such as muteness and tension through the portrayal of Jalila as a lonely being. This loneliness is combined with crawling on hands and knees when the character exits after her first appearance on stage and with her howling like a wolf toward the closing scene. This form of violence becomes a mode of expression, essentially, and symbolic as it relies more heavily on silence and body movements than upon speech.

Violence is not limited to female characters' experiences as shall be examined in this section. In this context, actor Aymen Mejri played the part of a young man who has suffered from being an outcast in Tunisian society due to his homosexual orientation and, yet, could not accept the shift of his boyfriend back to heterosexuality after 2011. The scene at hand portrays how Kais, who was a homosexual prior to 2011, soon transformed into a religious man and, thus, rejected his boyfriend after he manifested his heterosexuality upon

celebrating both his engagement to a woman and his commitment to a political party. The scene shows how such changes proved altogether shocking to Aymen who raged with fury and acted in a vengeful manner.

Countering the expectations of the audiences, actor Mejri arranges a rendezvous to meet with his former lover with the intention of stabbing him in the bathroom. Aymen's story with Kais suggests that violence, sometimes, takes place due to rejection; the violent resistance Aymen committed is neither due to self-infliction nor to harm by any outsider. Domestic violence in this scene is committed from within and cannot be examined based on the binary understanding of the advantaged and disadvantaged. It is worth noting that the focus on violence in this play is not limited to stereotypical cases of violence in which women, homosexuals or any other minority group is involved. Rather, violence is administered by such groups against themselves, considering violence as the sole means to resist violence or rejection, which leads the characters to fall into vicious circles for being, simultaneously, victims *and* perpetrators of violence.

Essentially, all the different representations of violence in the current drama aim to reflect the reasons why the number of people who are violent within this specific society is on the rise. An explanatory study should outline the political, socioeconomic, ideological, and psychological factors that are responsible for rendering a given society more violent than another, or more violent than previously. However, in *Violence*(*s*)the central theme of violence is left unresolved. The core argument of the performance focuses upon reflection of the evil side of the individual, rather than representative types of violent people. The sentence that the playwright Baccar borrows from the French author Albert Camus, "Un homme ça s'empèche" is meant to question the humaneness of the human being that has become unable to prevent himself from antipredatory behaviour. Camus' quote is useful in raising questions about conflicting human identities within the play. As Whitehead (2004) states "To be violent is clearly a capability we all possess, but why we should choose to be violent, or how we can be induced to act violently, will obviously differ culturally and historically" (p. 55-56).

In *Violence(s)*, the character Aymen, for instance, helps the audiences understand that it is not always true that assumptions are made about homosexuals. Rather, homosexuals make assumptions about each other. In raising such questions, the play involves not merely patriarchal but also sexual, political, and educational concerns and helps establish an overarching debate regarding the human being, in general and how, when vulnerable in his connections with others, Man possibly experiences insensitivity that drives him to commit violence, even murder. In his article, "The Concept of Violence," scholar Paul Harris quoted I.M. Cameron who explains how violence as "a source of life" justifies human existence. Cameron notes that it is through our violent actions that we express our true humanity. (Harris, 104). Clearly the ways Cameron and Camus approach human nature are contradictory. More contradictions in approaching human nature involve Rousseau and Hulme. Rousseau emphasized that man is innately good by nature and that his true self is good. Therefore, obstacles to man as a rational agent must be removed in order to realize his true self. Man, however, is regarded as naturally bad and limited from the point of view of Hulme. It is noted that these scholars paid particular attention to the question of agency and morality in an attempt to evaluate violent actions.

In an attempt to study the repercussions of the fractured political climate on the rise of violence in the Tunisian society and in an effort to include the fight against terrorism— an organized type of crime, the dramatists Baccar and Jaïbi attempt to incorporate a tragic scene that stands for an ideological context capable of generating an extreme case of a religiously motivated type of violence. The scene is recounted by Lobna, who reported that a terrorist committed an attack in Boumandil market in Tunis, where a child and his mother were shopping for a toy, and in which scene the child exploded together with his toy. Such a violent crime has a direct impact on the character Lobna, who seems to suffer further from child-related crimes that she has to investigate on a daily basis, mainly because she has recently become a mother and is at the stage of breast-feeding. This character evokes within the audiences emotions of fear and pity caused by the character's fear for children and her concern with the community's sense of security. Yet, the dramatists injected the scene with sarcasm as an expression of indifference toward the terrorist attack and other

atrocities. The indifference of characters toward the general atmosphere of terror explains further the reason why violence has become less questionable and taken as compatible practice with an outcome of expansion of terror. Many people have simply become inured to the regular images and accounts of violence within society, and the world at large.

In addition to the investigation of violence in the context of politics, the institution of education is also tainted by aggression. For example, the character Lobna investigates an extreme case of violence at school. The scene concerns a secondary school teacher of philosophy who was the victim of violence targeted by her pupils—actors who recently graduated from L'Ecole National de l'Acteur[ii]; Nesrine Mouelhi, Ahmed Taha Hamrouni, Aymen Mejri and Mouïn Moumni. These pupils decided to take revenge against their teacher by pushing her through the window of a classroom located on the building's third floor. The scene shows how each of the teacher's pupils tortured a particular part of her body after her fall as if to express, via black humor, their rejection of a discipline the principles of which are logic, aesthetics, ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology.

It is important to note how in this scene these pupils tortured their teacher's body and to regard the style used by the dramatists, showing how they treated her body with black humour and satire, while retaining the devastating impact of the crime. The pupils' expression of hate toward their teacher and their collective experience of murdering her mirror a larger reality in which violence pervades schools. The leitmotif of agency and responsibility is again in place perhaps to question how most teachers in Tunisia are not qualified to help teenagers manage the effects of violence, nor have theylearned how to teach pupilsabout options to violent conduct and delinquency.On the other hand, when detained for being accomplices in murdering their teacher, the pupils—both good and delinquent— provided hints as to why they committed such a crime. Character Mouelhi expresses how she is filled with hate for her teacher, friends, education, and to everything, including her own self. While the teacher's story exhibits how our society failed to protect teachers from violence, it is not blinded to increased violence and hatred among the youth and to the need to consider how to protect the younger generations from violence.

The results of this thematic and aesthetic study of violence are consistent with my previous analyses of Jaïbiand Baccar's productions in terms of their use of the Brechtian theory of distanciation. The aim of this article was to elicit the commonly recurring trope of violence based on the construction of scenes of extreme violent cases through uncommon situations. Only then can we observe and rethink why our society has become so violent in recent years. Of particular interest is our examination of curious props, such as the glass and the multiple meanings it generates. To the interpreting observer, the use of glass is able to reconcile opposites as the dust stands, among other interpretations, for confusion and obscurity while it literally represents separation.

In addition, it must be noted that thin glass reinforces the doubling effect as it represents a slender layer, symbolic of the double self, shifting the locus of observation outside the real self and expanding on the psychological alienated inner self. The mirror symbol maintains the alienating effect throughout the play. As demonstrated earlier, Brecht's distanciation techniques are maintained successfully throughout the play by other methods, including fusing the tragic and the comic, these controversial emotions that are also meant to contribute to the doubling effect. The latter has been portrayed by illustrating how characters are torn between love and hatred, kindness and vengeance, decency and crime to the extent that they can no longer repress such discordance. This effect is, too, maintained by the dramatists to encourage the audiences to rethink domestic violence outside the context of the individual, considering other contexts such as the individual's family relationships and other institutions within the broader Tunisian society.

In short, rethinking violence sheds light on what has been inspiring violence in Tunisia, particularly in recent years. *Violence(s)*conveys how atrocious crimes committed against women or men, and which are usually quite invisible, are rendered in this play as not only visible but also subversive through the representation of women and men's criminal reactions against their own gender group. The subversive style includes the cases of gender-based violence committed by Fatma against her son Hamma, and of Aymen against his lover, Kais. Subversion complicates further the question of violence without providing any answers to explain why this phenomenon has been on the rise, mainly after

the 2011 Revolution. The intended contribution of this article emerges from the ways in which rising violence is examined through the lens of alienation techniques to ensure that the audience is constantly aware that it is observing the performance of a play. In other words, distanciation provides these lead actors as well as audiences with an opportunity to understand that theatre is a mere representation of the reality. Dramatists Baccar and Jaïbi would only corroborate Brecht's theory of distanciation and suggest that theatre can help to engender essential social transformation by developing in the audience the ability to analyse wide-ranging social concerns rationally.

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