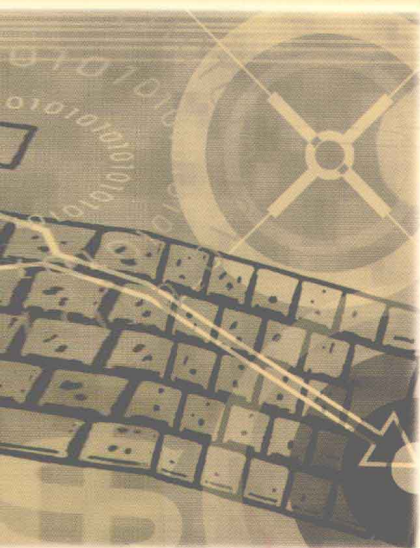


活动理论视角下的数字技术与 与语言学习关系论

An Activity Theory View of the Relationship Between Digital
Technology and Language Learning

● 张 颖 著



复旦大学出版社

活动理论视角下的数字技术与语言学习关系论

An Activity Theory View of the Relationship Between Digital Technology and Language Learning

● 张 颖 著

復旦大學出版社

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

活动理论视角下的数字技术与语言学习关系论:英文/
张颖著. —上海:复旦大学出版社, 2011. 7
ISBN 978-7-309-08168-8

I. 活… II. 张… III. 语言教学-教学研究-高等学校-英文
IV. H09

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2011)第 103457 号

活动理论视角下的数字技术与语言学习关系论:英文
张 颖 著
责任编辑/唐 敏

复旦大学出版社有限公司出版发行
上海市国权路 579 号 邮编:200433
网址: fupnet@fudanpress.com <http://www.fudanpress.com>
门市零售:86-21-65642857 团体订购:86-21-65118853
外埠邮购:86-21-65109143
大丰市科星印刷有限责任公司

开本 850 × 1168 1/32 印张 6.25 字数 157 千
2011 年 7 月第 1 版第 1 次印刷

ISBN 978-7-309-08168-8/H · 1718
定价: 15.00 元

如有印装质量问题, 请向复旦大学出版社有限公司发行部调换。
版权所有 侵权必究

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Abstract	2
List of Tables	4
List of Figures	6
Chapter 1 Introduction	7
1.1 Introduction	7
1.2 Research Foci	8
1.3 Research Approach	10
1.4 Significance	11
Chapter 2 Language Learning and Digital Technology	13
2.1 Second Language Acquisition — a General Picture	13
2.2 Language Learning Involving Digital Technology	19
2.2.1 Recent Developments in Studies of Language Learning Involving Digital Technology	20
2.2.2 The Relationship Between Digital Technology and Language Learning	27
2.3 Out-of-class Use of Digital Technology by Learners	33
2.3.1 Understanding Learner, Digital Technology, and Context	34

2.3.2 Using Digital Technology in Out-of-class Situations	36
2.4 Summary	45
Chapter 3 An Activity Theory View	48
3.1 Research Objectives	48
3.2 The Theoretical Framework	49
3.2.1 Activity Theory — a Brief Introduction	52
3.2.2 Why Activity Theory?	59
3.2.3 Operationalising Activity Theory	61
3.3 A Multiple-case Study Approach	65
3.4 Activity Theory-guided Research Design	71
3.5 Activity Theory-guided Data Analysis	75
3.5.1 Data Analysis Framework	75
3.5.2 Data Presentation	79
3.6 Summary	80
Chapter 4 The Story of Rong	82
4.1 Rong as the Computer User	83
4.2 Rong as the Language Learner	89
4.3 Digital Technology in English-Related Practices	94
4.3.1 “I’m using the computer to study English and prepare for English tests.”	94
4.3.2 “I’m not studying but using English on the computer.”	104
4.3.3 “I’m learning English in the computer activities.”	107
4.4 Conclusion — the Computer Mainly as a ‘Tape Recorder’	110

Chapter 5 The Story of Tang	114
5.1 Tang as the Computer User	115
5.2 Tang as the Language Learner	118
5.3 Digital Technology in English-Related Practices	124
5.3.1 "I'm using the computer to prepare for English tests."	124
5.3.2 "I'm not studying but using English on the Computer."	126
5.4 Conclusion — the Computer; a Dual Life in Relation to English	136
Chapter 6 Discussion	140
6.1 The Cultures-of-use of Digital Technology in Relation to Learning English	140
6.2 Digitally Mediated Language Learning	144
6.2.1 A Model of Digitally-mediated-language-learning	144
6.2.2 The Relation Between Digital Technology and Language Learning from the Learner's Perspective	150
6.3 Conclusion	156
Chapter 7 Conclusion	157
7.1 Summary of Findings	158
7.1.1 Learners' Out-of-class Use of Digital Technology in Relation to Language Learning	158
7.1.2 The Driving Forces of the Use of Digital Technology in Relation to English Learning	160

7.1.3	The Relation Between Digital Technology and Language Learning from the Learner's Perspective	162
7.2	Contributions of the Study	163
7.3	Implications on Educational Practices	165
7.4	Concluding Remarks	169
	Bibliography	170

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisors, Dr. Ian Stevenson and Professor Constant Leung for their insightful guidance and consistent support.

I have also been most fortunate to have the grant of the KC Wong Scholarship, without which I might not have had the chance to study in DEPS of King's College London. The first-rate seminars and courses have offered me training highly beneficial to my academic life.

I would like to thank the participants who graciously cooperated with me in the fieldwork. This book is written about them and for them. I hope the study can ultimately benefit Chinese university students with respect to learning English in the digital era.

I am most indebted to my husband, my daughter, and my parents, who have unfailingly given me their full understanding, support, and love. My daughter has borne my long absence with the greatest patience and bravery. This book is in a sense in honour of the sacrifices my family made for me.

Abstract

This book presents an in-depth, qualitative case study of Chinese undergraduates' self-directed, out-of-class use of digital technology in relation to learning English as a Foreign Language. This study is significant since there is a growing demand of competent English-speaking college graduates in China while there is also growing ownership of digital technologies by Chinese university students. There has been however little fine-grained research on how Chinese students are handling the technology in relation to learning English.

After reviewing relevant literature, I propose a sociocultural approach to analyse the research objectives. The approach was operationalised in an activity theory generated framework, under the guidance of which, a multiple-case study was designed. Seven undergraduates were recruited, and data of their out-of-class activities in relation to learning English using digital technologies were collected, using questionnaire, screen capture, and personal journals over a five-month period. The participants were also interviewed using critical incidents to describe their actions. From these data sources several case studies were constructed on the out-of-class uses which Chinese undergraduates made of digital technology in relation to learning English.

Following a cross-case analysis of the seven students, I identified three types of activities — 'learning to the test', 'languageing', and 'diffuse language learning'. Together the three

types of activities form a spectrum which showed the ‘cultures-of-use’ — the sedimented characteristics — of digital technology in relation to learning English in Chinese undergraduates’ discursive, out-of-class lives on campus.

List of Tables

Table 3-1	The Eight-Step-Model	65
Table 3-2	Research questions generated by the Eight-Step-Model	72
Table 3-3	Questions guiding the conduction of the methods	73
Table 3-4	The structure of activity	78
Table 4-1	Summary of the data of the questionnaire by Rong	84
Table 4-2	Log of one-week computer activities by Rong	87
Table 4-3	Log of one-week out-of-class English learning practices by Rong	91
Table 4-4	Screen capture episode of using CD-ROM to study textbook by Rong	96
Table 4-5	Screen capture episode of practising listening with pronunciation software by Rong	100
Table 4-6	Rong's out-of-class use of digital technology in relation to learning English	110
Table 5-1	Summary of the data of questionnaire by Tang	116
Table 5-2	Log of one-day computer activities by Tang	117

Table 5-3	Screen capture episode of finding information of computer technology by Tang	127
Table 5-4	Screen capture episode of visiting the website of computer games by Tang	130
Table 5-5	Tang's out-of-class use of digital technology in relation to learning English	137
Table 6-1	The CALL Equation	150

List of Figures

Fig. 3-1	An activity system	53
Fig. 3-2	The activity system of Chinese undergraduates’ English language practices involving digital technology	77
Fig. 6-1	Spectrum of participants’ use of digital technology in relation to learning English	141
Fig. 6-2	A model of digitally-mediated language learning	145

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This is a study of campus-resident undergraduates' self-directed, out-of-class use of digital technologies in relation to learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the context of Chinese higher education. Generally speaking, although the power, potential, and impact of digital technology in relation to language learning have been widely discussed in literature, many of the discussions are carried out from the pedagogical point of view. Learners' perspectives have not been explored much even though they are often acclaimed as 'digital natives' who seem to have integrated digital technologies into their daily lives (Kennedy, Krause et al. 2006). If adult learners such as undergraduates were truly digital natives, there might then be a gap between these digital natives' use of digital technologies and that of teachers — 'digital immigrants' (Prensky 2001); thus, many are arguing that it is important to investigate students' experiences with and uses of digital technologies so that teachers can incorporate digital technology in meaningful ways in pedagogical practices.

However so far most of the studies that investigate undergraduates' ownership of, use of, and experiences with digital technology have been large-scale quantitative studies (Salaway, Caruso et al. 2008). There are few fine-grained studies that observe how college students actually use digital technology in daily life, and why they approach and use

technologies in such ways (Kennedy, Krause et al. 2006), especially in situations where undergraduates initiate the interaction with digital technology on their own, and where they are not concentrating on coursework. There are even less understandings of learners' self-initiated interactions with digital technology in relation to language learning.

Drawing on some Chinese university campus-resident undergraduates, this study showcases their self-directed, out-of-class use of digital technologies embodied in their ownership of personal computers. Emphasising students' perspectives and voices, this study provides a rich, thick, and in-depth account of the learner and his/her uses of digital technology in relation to language learning practices in context.

This chapter presents a brief introduction. It begins with an introduction of the background to and the motivation behind the research focus. Thereafter, research design and the significance of the study are sketched.

1.2 Research Foci

This study has been carried out against the backdrop of the current large-scale reform in the provision of English language education in higher education in People's Republic of China (China). The general term for English for non-English majors in higher education institutions in China is College English, which is a compulsory course for undergraduates. The large-scale College English reform was launched in 2002, involving 180 universities. The reform is, on one hand, a response to the criticism that decades of English teaching in higher education in China seems to have resulted in what Chinese English educationalists term as

'dumb English' (a lack of communication skills) for many students. The reform is also an attempt to meet the demand of 'fluent English-speaking talents' by the fast developing economy of China. Communication skills in English are thus regarded as the top priority of College English education in China. There is, however, one great obstacle to the teaching and learning of communication skills — the large class size. Since 1999 the Chinese government has decided to increase yearly college enrollment to reach an average rate of 49% . Meanwhile facilities and teacher training have neither been qualitatively nor quantitatively improved. To alleviate the pressure faced by the increasing enrollment and to encourage 'autonomy' in students, computers are provided on many of the Chinese university campuses. The Chinese decision-making authorities seem to share the same faith in technology with some of their western counterparts that " ... the mere presence of technology — or more specifically, computers — implies learning" (Mellon 1999).

Against this background the following research questions are asked. What use of digital technologies is brought along by students who seem to be empowered by the ownership of personal computers, yet at the same time still subjected to the rules and conditions such as described above? Why such uses? And how do their uses of digital technologies bear upon their practices of learning English as a Foreign Language?

The issue underlying is the relationship between digital technology and language learning, which is becoming increasingly complex, especially from the learner's perspective — language can be the tool to help learning technologies, and technologies can be the tool to aid mastering the language, both being tools for individual and societal development (Warschauer 2002).

Complexity such as this can be overlooked by mere quantification of students' use of digital technology in relation to coursework. There is a need to supplement findings of quantitative studies with qualitative, interpretative understandings.

This study is hence an attempt to achieve a qualitative, interpretative understanding by making sense of students' use of digital technologies in their daily life and to ground answers to the research questions in the contextual understanding of the 'stuff' the learner is doing with the computer. Three aspects of the phenomenon in focus are emphasised: First, the user — students' voices and perspectives are carefully noted to achieve an 'insider' account. Second, their uses of digital technologies of relevance to this study do not just include those intentional uses for 'studying English' but also uses that discursively involve English in real-life situations. Third, the contextual influences that shape students' use of digital technologies are discussed not by providing an inventory of factors that appear to be affecting participants' actions, but by a thick description of participants' lives in which their actions make sense.

1.3 Research Approach

To carry out an in-depth exploration of participants' activities in their day-to-day lives, with a qualitative approach, this study spanned five months in a natural setting — a Chinese university campus. Activity theory (AT) (Nardi 1996) with its sociocultural understandings of digital technologies as tools is adopted as a framework to guide the study. With this framework, the study attempts to draw out the complex relationship between participants and the social, cultural, and historical context in which they are