Developing technology-mediated language awareness through bridging activities

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Jonathon Reinhardt
University of Arizona

Outline

• A typical scenario?
• Technology-mediated texts and practices
• New literacies and identities
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• Technology-mediated language awareness
• A model for implementing Bridging Activities
• Sample Activities
• Digital Games
• Gameplay as textual practice
• Digital game-mediated bridging activities
• Future directions
How typical?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teens and Technology: Summary of Findings at a Glance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Teens are technology rich and enveloped by a wired world.</td>
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<td>45% of teens have cell phones and 33% are texting.</td>
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<td>Email is still a fixture in teens’ lives, but IM is preferred.</td>
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<td>Teens share more than words over IM.</td>
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<td>Half of families with teens have broadband.</td>
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<td>Face-to-face time still beats phone and screen time.</td>
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<td>Most teens use shared computers at home and growing numbers log on from libraries, school, and other locations.</td>
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<td>The size of the wired teen population surges at the seventh grade mark.</td>
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<td>Older girls are power communicators and information seekers.</td>
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Tech-mediated texts and practices

- **CMC**: may be synchronous or asynchronous, may be stand alone (IM, chat)
- **Blogs**: may be individual, group, news-oriented, community- or domain-oriented; may emphasize authorship
- **Collaborative Documents**: e.g. wikis or Googledocs; de-emphasizes authorship
- **Mashups & machinima**: involve the appropriation, combination, and re-configuration of various texts and media types (e.g. videos, music, animation)
- **Texting and Twittering**: constrain and afford language use and communication in new ways
- **Social networking & collaborating** (e.g. Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn)
- **Digital gaming** (MMOGs, SIEs, Virtual Worlds, stand-alone games): often involve social collaboration and identity play
- Tech-mediated texts and practices are **converging** (Jenkins, 2006), as everyday use increasingly combines all of the above
New literacies and identities

- “New Literacies’ refers to an understanding of literacy as socially situated, dynamic, and multi-modal. In this sense, the practice of literacies goes beyond reading and writing to mean any use of signs (i.e. the interaction with, and generation of texts) in appropriate and relevant ways for purposes recognized by a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; New London Group, 1996)
- Becoming ‘literate’ in a particular practice (i.e. learning) involves the development of an identity appropriate to that practice. (Gee, 2003; 2007)
- Technology-mediated new literacies, or electronic literacies (Warschauer, 1999), or new media literacies (Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) involve literacy in a wide variety of dynamic and increasingly interwoven modes, genres, registers, and domains.
- As with any practice, learning tech-mediated practices involves identity development; the unique multi-modal qualities of tech-mediation afford this development in non-traditional ways, e.g. they may promote identity play and experimentation (Gee, 2007: real-world, virtual, and projective)
- A view of literacy as socially co-constructed is at odds with educational models and practices based on a transmission model of communication (e.g. drilling, testing, de-contextualized memorization).

Bridging Activities
(Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008; Reinhardt & Thorne, 2009)

- Internet technologies have transformed everyday communicative contexts, genres, and practices
- New, tech-mediated literacies are highly relevant to youth culture, but present curricular integration and implementation challenges (e.g. How do we teach them? Which technologies? Which texts? Which practices?)
- Performing tech-mediated identities is as important (if not more) than face-to-face
- Technology is more than a medium for L2 practice, it is now a viable medium for everyday L2 use in an of itself, and thus should be a pedagogical goal
- Bridging Activities: bridge between in-class activity and everyday, out-of-class tech-mediated language use, by having students collect and analyze tech-mediated texts of their own choosing in the language of study, and ultimately participate in tech-mediated practices in the language of study.
Tech-mediated language awareness

• The goal of Bridging Activities is to develop awareness of the language of study (and of language more generally) by developing awareness of tech-mediated language, through technological means
• Language Awareness: an understanding of the interrelationships between language choice and social function
• Language is understood as an embodiment of social practice. Language use is presented as an object of analysis, and lexico-grammar is presented as emergent from use and contextually dependent.
• Technology-mediated language is both the means and the object of this awareness
  • As the means: multimodal quality of technological mediation is authentic/everyday (it’s what they do), useful (it’s what they may need to do in the language of study), and effective (in a way that affords learning)
  • As the object: understanding of the context-, genre-, and practice-specific uses of a particular tech-mediated language type may transfer to understanding of all language uses as contextually contingent

A model for implementing Bridging Activities

Observation & Collection:
• Purpose: to situate learner-relevant practices for analysis and future creation
• Ss observe Internet practices and collect texts of interest, focusing on identification, description, and reflection

Exploration & Analysis:
• Purpose: to notice, critically examine, and compare the linguistic (i.e. register) and social (i.e. genre) features of the Internet texts and practices under study.
• Ss analyze the linguistic and social features of the observed and collected texts, using genre-, corpus-, and comparative analysis techniques.

Participation & Creation:
• Purpose: to participate in Internet practices and create Internet texts
• Ss participate in Internet practices, e.g. blog and messageboard posts, and create Internet texts, e.g. videos, blogs, webpages, etc.
• Ideally, leads Ss to observe, collect, explore, analyze, create, and participate in new texts and practices in the language of study, either as part of a structured class activity, or on their own as independent learners.
Available frameworks

• **ACTFL communication standards** (e.g. Shrum & Glisan, 2005): preparation (interpretive) → comprehension (interpretive) → interpretation (interpretive/interpersonal) → application (presentational)

• **Cultural experience** (e.g. Moran, 2001): participation (know how) → description (know about) → interpretation (know why) → reflection (know oneself)

• **Genre instruction** (e.g. Hyland, 2004): developing context → modeling → joint negotiation → independent construction → comparing texts

• **Language awareness** (McCarthy & Carter, 1994; van Lier 1995): discourse features ↔ social contexts (contrastive, continuum, inferencing)

• **Multiliteracies** (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kern, 2000): situated practice → overt instruction → critical framing → transformed practice
Observation & Collection

Internet Use Survey
• **Objective:** to become aware of one’s own Internet use habits, and to compare those to others.
• **Description:** Ss first conduct Web research on Internet and technology use habits in the countries of study and in the US. They then create a survey and administer it to themselves in the language of study, and to other students in English. Back in class they consolidate the results and present them to the class.

Net text Portfolio
• **Objective:** to collect Internet texts for reflection and analysis by creating a portfolio of texts such as chat and IM transcripts, messageboard archives, blog page copies, etc.
• **Description:** Over the course of the semester, Ss collect Internet texts that they have observed and participated in, for inclusion in a portfolio, which can be print or online in the form of a personal blog or wiki. Ss annotate each entry with reflection, and may also include analyses and reports on a certain number of texts.

Exploration & Analysis

Genre Report
• **Objectives:** Ss develop awareness of the social, genre-based features of a particular text they have chosen to analyze.
• **Description:** As a class, in pairs, or individually, Ss learn about the concept of genre and conduct an informal genre analysis of a particular text. The report can be printed, posted in a blog or portfolio, or presented in class.

Lexplorer
• **Objectives:** Ss develop awareness of basic corpus-based lexical features of a text of their choice, focusing on word frequency, co-text, and collocations.
• **Description:** Ss first create a mini-corpus of Internet texts and conduct a frequency analysis on it using basic corpus tools. If a large corpus in the language of study is available, Ss conduct a concordance activity on words that they have analyzed in the frequency analysis.

Net text Comparison
• **Objectives:** Ss develop critical awareness of the differences and similarities among Internet texts in regards to genre and corpus-based frequency profiles.
• **Description:** Ss compare and contrast Internet texts by considering the analyses they have completed for the genre and Lexplorer activities.
Participation & Creation

Post and Participate

• **Objectives:** Ss participate in an existing Internet practice in the language of study, and to observe and document any reply or reaction their participation creates.

• **Description:** In this activity, students participate in an Internet practice of their choice in the language of study, e.g. comment on a YouTube video, a news messageboard, or participate in a chat. Ss document their participation and reflect on any reaction or follow-up that their participation generates.

Internet Design Project

• **Objectives:** Ss work together to create a digital product in the language of study, based on their new understandings of Internet texts and practices. The final products should be posted online if possible, and reactions and comments noted.

• **Description:** Ss work in groups to create an Internet product, e.g. a video, wikipedia entry, podcast, or fanfiction post, of their choice and design in the language of study. Groups post the product online to an actual Internet audience.

What about games?

• Digital games = computer and video games (computer, console, handheld, iPod, Internet-based, etc.)

• **Types:** 1st, 3rd p shooter, role play, adventure, simulation; solo, multiplayer; puzzle, contest, story

• Digital games are a $35 billion global industry (20% growth in 2008), and may thus reflect corporatist values. On the other hand, market pressure may also drive innovation in learning design.

• **Critical game studies** views digital games as a site of cultural semiosis and potential transformation (e.g. McAllister, 2004). World of Warcraft, for example, has been analyzed as reflective of capitalist, military, and neo-colonial values (Corneliusen & Rettberg, 2008).

• With regards to **learning**, digital games have been studied as a means of **skills development** (Prensky, 2001; 2005), of learning through **social interaction and literacy development** (Steinkuehler, 2004; Thomas & Brown, 2007; Gee, 2003; 2007). Arnseth (2006) describes the distinction as 'playing to learn' as opposed to 'learning to play'.

• With regards to **language learning**, digital games, in particular MMOGs, offer opportunity for meaningful interaction in a **low-risk**, but **socially high stakes** environment that is highly **customizable** (Purushotma, 2005; Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008; Thorne, 2008).
Gameplay as textual practice

- Digital game-mediated learning activities may promote language development by focusing on the narratives and identities generated, negotiated and practiced during gameplay.
- Game studies scholars analyze the design of digital games. Ludologists (Aarseth, 1997; Frasca, 1999; Juul, 2005) focus on the rule-bound, strategy-based nature of gameplay, while narratologists (Calleja, 2007; Neitzel, 2005; Simons, 2007) claim narrative analytic frameworks are appropriate for the study of games.
- Designed narratives (Calleja, 2007) or fictional worlds (Juul, 2005) are the themes, worlds, and stories created by the game designers as original authors, while personal (Calleja), emergent (Juul), or designing narratives are those experienced by the player as implied author.
- Interaction between the designed and designing narratives provide an intertextual locus for meaning making, as “the text of the game is central to but indistinguishable from the texts that players create by inhabiting and playing in the world” (Thomas & Brown, 2007, p. 153).
- Identity play is involved, as players shift between and integrate their real-world, virtual, and projective identities (Gee 2003; 2007) while interacting with and generating narratives.

Digital game-mediated bridging activities

- Bridging activities in digital games involve the collection, analysis, and creation of narratives that integrate identity transformation (real-world <-> projective <-> virtual) and designed and designing narratives, and awareness of the linguistic and social elements therein.
- While gameplay already involves the activities of observation, exploration, and participation, the critical aspects of collection, analysis, and creation of narratives require teacher-mediated facilitation and guidance.
- Goals: develop language awareness and game literacy (Gee, 2007), i.e. awareness of gaming itself as a socially-situated practice.
- Activities:
  - Observation and Collection:
    • Produce and collect narratives
  - Exploration and Analysis:
    • Reflect on narratives
    • Notice language use (what) and language used (how, why)
    • Notice rules and strategies
    • Critically analyze fictional worlds and game structure
  - Participation and Creation:
    • Interact with other players, in- and outside of the game
    • Create new narratives in new modes through transformation
Researching a digital game for L2/FLE

1. Find a game (e.g. WoW, Chocolatier, Sims, or check out www.playfirst.com or www.gonzagames.com)
2. Learn to play the game and play it for at least a few hours.
3. Game structure: Analyze the game structure and the rules around which the game is built.
4. Game language: Outline the language inventory of the game (content domain, lexico-grammar, functions, registers, genres). Consider the objects the player must interact with, the actions s/he must complete, and language used in the interface.
5. Gameplay as task: Note how the activities in the game could be considered tasks.
6. Gameplay as textual practice: Consider the experienced (designing) narratives created by playing the game, as well as the embedded (designed) narratives encountered by playing the game.

Future directions

• Implement and evaluate Bridging Activities in the language classroom, assess development of language awareness and document language development
• Develop an online 'Lexplorer' tool for exploration and analysis activities, a tech-mediated text corpus with corpus analytic tools
• Digital game-mediated L2 literacy development (Reinhardt, in progress):
  • Participants & procedures: 8 ESL students, playing WoW in a group and completing game-mediated bridging activities
  • Methods: ethnographic techniques & discourse analysis
  • Hypothesis: the integration of identities and narratives in social MMOGplay affords language development
  • In acts of MMOGplay collaboration, evidence for identity integration will be in the mixing of voice and person in a MMOG role play capacity (e.g. who 'I' or 'we' refers to in 'I (or we) killed the dragon'), and for narrative shifting and integration in the mixing of designed and designing narratives.
Thank you

jonrein@email.arizona.edu
http://www.u.arizona.edu/~jonrein
REFERENCES


