

IMANDARIN: IMPROVING BUSINESS CHINESE LEARNING WITH MOBILE DEVICES

Han Ye, The Pennsylvania State University, Altoona, Pennsylvania USA
Mark M. Lennon, The Pennsylvania State University, Altoona, Pennsylvania USA

ABSTRACT

With the increasing economic influence of Chinese businesses, and the desire for business practitioners, academics, and students, to gain mastery of the Chinese language, a need to facilitate study of both spoken and written Chinese in a nontraditional manner has arisen. For in an age where students are digital natives – born and raised in an internet and mobile device world – appropriate pedagogical methods must be developed. This paper addresses these needs by reviewing relevant literature, then introducing two popular Apps used for Business Chinese language education. Suggestions for implementation of mobile Apps for language learning are presented.

Keywords: Chinese Language Learning, Mobile Assisted Language Learning, Mobile Device, IPAD

1. INTRODUCTION

Mobile internet services have proliferated at an accelerated pace in the past decade. In 2011, 6 billion people worldwide subscribed to mobile services, in comparison to less than a billion in 2000 (Telenor Group, 2013). The number of internet users also increased exponentially from half a billion to 2.3 billion (Telenor Group, 2013) in the same period. This rapid spread of mobile internet services has greatly impacted lives of millions, especially young people and children (Milman, 2010). Mobile services users are able to access an unprecedented range of information and communicate with people regardless of their physical location through emails, text messages, and various social media 24 hours a day (Arruda-Filho & Lennon, 2011; Arruda Filho & Lennon, 2012). Ceaseless mobile internet access has rapidly becoming an important part of the life of the young generation (Lennon, 2006, 2011a). As a result, these young people become digital natives, who grow up in a world with personal computers and the internet (M. Prensky, 2001; Marc Prensky, 2012).

2. MOBILE TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

In school, educators face students who grow up in a world with personal computers, the internet, and mobile devices (Arruda-Filho & Lennon, 2011) whereas the educators themselves are, most of the times, digital immigrants (Bittman, Rutherford, Brown, & Unsworth, 2012; Marc Prensky, 2012) who only learned the use of these technologies later in life. With the proliferation and rapid innovation of mobile technology, mobile devices like the iPod, iPhone, and iPads, these mobile devices are expeditiously used by educators in their teaching (Stockwell, 2010). For these digital native students, learning successfully occurs through manipulating various features of these devices and the software that runs on them (Girard, Litzinger, & Lennon, 2013). In the business disciplines, software Applications (Apps) can assist students in learning subject matter in a range of disciplines, including international marketing (Girard et al., 2013) and international business (Lennon & Girard, 2013).

3. MALL (MOBILE ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING)

When the digital immigrant generation teaches the digital native generation at school, a new way of learning is needed. This new way of learning has to ensure continuity and spontaneity of access to the various contexts of the learners' personal, portable mobile devices. Known as MALL - Mobile Assisted Language Learning (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008), the incorporation of mobile devices can be more effective than the traditional teacher-centered, group-oriented classroom. MALL appeals to the younger generation as it enables a learner-centered learning environment (Oberg & Daniels, 2013), in which learners are able to engage their learning in a self-paced manner (Oberg & Daniels, 2013; Thoermer & Williams, 2012). This independence of learning increases student motivation (Larson, 2007). These techniques have been successfully applied in situations where this need for individually pacing is critical,

such as students with special needs, such as youth with autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities (Flores et al., 2012; Light & McNaughton, 2012; McNaughton & Light, 2013; Murdock et al., 2013; Thoermer & Williams, 2012).

4. MOBILE APP BASED FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Foreign language learners too can greatly benefit from this new way of learning. Known as MALU - Mobile Assisted Language Use (Jarvis & Achilleos, 2013), students are able to better set their own pace of learning, while maintaining a sense of connectedness through participation in social media while learning the foreign language (Jarvis, 2012). Use of tablets like the iPad (Flores et al., 2012) and accompanying mobile apps (Godwin-Jones, 2011) is especially helpful to students when learning foreign languages like Chinese, with its character based reading and writing system (Thoermer & Williams, 2012) and building vocabulary (Stockwell, 2010; Sweeney & Moore, 2012).

This paper will now consider two such Apps, Trainchinese and ChinesePod, which are successfully being used by US business students and educators who are learning Chinese (Pinxiang, 2011). Both Apps take a similar approach of combining an internet based website application combined with mobile apps available on both the Apple and Android platforms. The following figures are taken directly from these websites:

FIGURE 1: CHINESEPOD WEBSITE

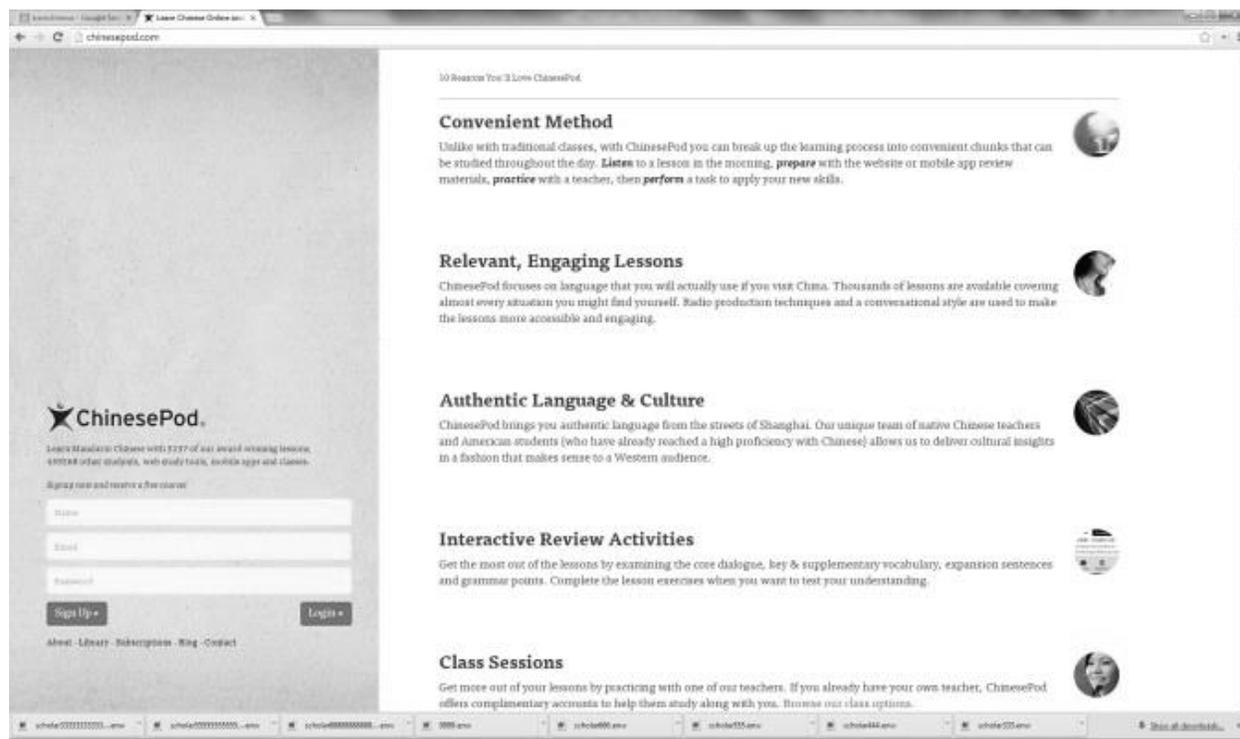


FIGURE 2: TRAINCHINESE WEBSITE



Prior to the creation of tablet technology, ChinesePod existed only as a website combined with downloadable Chinese language sound file for the Apple iPod. With the development of tablet computers, first the iPad and later, Android models, ChinesePod offered mobile Apps as well. This strategy concurs with research on the effectiveness of tablets in foreign language learning (Chen, 2013).

Trainchinese.com offers Apps that feature customizable vocabulary lists (see Figure 3) and flash card leaning (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 3: TRAINCHINESE APP BASED VOCABULARY LISTS



FIGURE 4: TRAINCHINESE APP BASED FLASH CARD TRAINING



For listening and comprehension skills, ChinesePod uses its original iPod based sound files consisting of the traditional, standard, recorded dialogues of business conversations. In contrast, Trainchinese offers an additional App (Figure 5) that allows students to practice the important skill of tone recognition associated with the Romanized version of written Chinese *pinyin* (Ho & Bryant, 1997). Development of this combination of skills is highly desirable for the Business Chinese language learner. For without tonal comprehension, communication in Chinese can be challenging (Gottardo, Yan, Siegel, & Wade-Woolley, 2001).

FIGURE 5: TRAINCHINESE APP BASED TONE RECOGNITION



5. CONCLUSION

Given the importance of foreign language learning, particularly Chinese, to business scholars, students, and practitioners, mobile device based Apps can be an effective use of their limited time resources. By engaging the learners individually, and allowing them to proceed at their own pace, Business Chinese language Apps are a new type of learning methodology that can meet the needs of the of both the digital native and the digital immigrant in improving their foreign language proficiency.

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AUTHOR PROFILES

Dr. Han Ye (Ph.D. University of Florida) teaches courses in Japanese and Chinese language, literature, and culture at The Pennsylvania University, Altoona. She is an experienced professional in the field of teaching Chinese as a Second Language and teaching Japanese as Second Language. Awarded her doctorate from the University of Florida, Gainesville Florida, her research interests include heritage language learning, linguistics, imetrics, foreign language pedagogy, and mobile learning. A native of Beijing, she has taught in in several Asian countries (China, Japan, and Singapore) and since 2005 has studied and later worked in the United States full time. Details about her background can be found on her professional website www.HanYeLaoshi.com

Dr. Mark Lennon (Ph.D. University of Rhode Island) teaches and develops courses in Strategy, International Business, and International Marketing at The Pennsylvania University, Altoona for delivery through the Penn State World Campus online program. An expert in online course development, as described on his professional website www.MarkPhD.com his research interests include mobile telecommunications, business model creation, technology acceptance and implementation, imetrics, mobile pedagogy, and all aspects of East Asia