

A Case Study of Digital Natives Using English Buzzword ‘cue’ in Vocabulary Capacity in Second Language Acquisition in China

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Abstract: With the increasing fragmentation of people's reading habits and the prevalence of attention distractions, internet buzzwords, which focus on capturing the essence of events and reflecting the sentiments of the masses, have emerged and gained immense popularity online. However, even though there has been a series of research on this type of buzzword in China, most of the research on buzzwords tends to be limited to exploring the words' evolution and their application in a certain region, leaving a huge gap in the relationship between the use of buzzwords and users' vocabulary competence. Taking the buzzword 'cue' which is a typical "Anglo-Chinese style expression," for example, the case study tries to provide a new perspective in hopes of finding out the appearance of vocabulary capacity in internet buzzwords. The proposed research will employ a mixed-methods approach, integrating semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The former will be used to compare different kinds of digital natives' comprehension of the buzzword 'cue' after dividing them into 3 groups by their frequency of using electronic products. Simultaneously, a corpus of comments or responses will be gathered during the focus group discussions, aiming to discern any potential correlation between vocabulary competence and the use of buzzwords.

Keywords: buzzword, digital natives, vocabulary, second language acquisition

1. Introduction

This paper aims to examine the impact of the English buzzword 'cue' on the vocabulary capacity of digital natives in the context of second language acquisition in China. To this end, the following sections will delve into the background and will explore the process of network buzzword's generalization and popularity represented by 'cue', emphasizing their role as cultural symbols of the regional era. Then this work defines the core question guiding this study. The value of research in language learning, digital literacy, and other aspects will also be elucidated. Subsequently, the methodology section will outline the research design and detail the approach of the case study. Afterwards, the collected data will be summarized and analyzed to reveal the relationship between the use of popular words such as 'cue' by digital natives and their vocabulary competence [1,2].

1.1. Research background

Buzzword has a tendency to exert an increasingly wider influence, disseminate information faster and wider, and attain greater popularity as a significant form of Mass Culture. The combination of syntactic forms of Internet buzzwords is diverse. It encompasses a wide range of rich contents, highlighting several features such as the coexistence of popularity and interest, replicability and anti-classicality, and humanistic care in power struggle [3].

Even though a part of researchers reckon that network buzzwords are a special form of oral language, network buzzwords in this stage have presented incomparable creativity and diversity [4]. This kind of distinctive characteristic makes it different from written language and comes to be a strong dominant among the masses.

There are many cases in which a lot of words have shifted from the terminological to the simple language, which are used frequently in daily life by the public [5]. In this situation, a word, once limited to a fixed meaning within a specific domain, is taken up in general language. This process is defined as de-terminologization [6].

Generated by the network and applied to the network, internet buzzwords have special meanings in specific media or contexts [7]. Consequently, it is common to see this kind of de-terminologization when a buzzword evolved historically from a domain-specific buzzword to a buzzword in popular use.

The research target ‘cue’ probably originated from *qu*, which is the Latin abbreviation for ‘quando’ as a direction in actors' scripts of plays. For example: “She stood in the wings and waited for her cue to go on.” Consequently, even now, it can sometimes be used as a signal to a performer to begin a specific speech or action. Except for acting, a cue is similar to a hint or something serving a comparable purpose. Besides, to cue is to prompt or to provide with a cue as a verb [8].

As a Chinese buzzword, cue means “to call, to shout, to mention.” [9]. In a specific context, it generally refers to calling or taking turns to someone. The reason why it is popular on the Chinese Internet is because of the launch of a large number of variety shows, at first in Taiwan, for example, in the famous TV show *KangXiLaiLe*, the hosts frequently used ‘cue’ to lead out the guests to the stage. Therefore, Taiwanese netizens also use ‘cue’ as a daily buzzword, and the meaning of ‘cue’ gradually evolved from the beginning of “the camera pointed to someone during the photography process” to “call someone or choose someone”.

It is reasonable that network buzzwords are appreciated by internet users of different occupations, educational backgrounds, and regions due to their comprehensibility [10]. Therefore, there have been some mainland netizens exposed to the word ‘cue’ much earlier. Still, its prevalence in the Chinese mainland should be undoubtedly after 2010 when a series of local variety shows sprung up, especially in 2018, spit Roast of the separate mention as well as microblogging and other social media fueled the word out of the entertainment area and be accepted by the people as a daily buzzword. “Internet buzzwords” have gradually moved from “inside the network” to “outside the network” [3]. Until 2023, it is normal to see this word frequently underneath trending searches and comments.

The de-terminologization of Buzzwords contributes to the evolution of the eras. The buzzword ‘cue’, used to be applied in the entertainment industry only but finally developed to be a common speech as its derivation process in Ancient Roman. Meanwhile, buzzwords reflect the social characteristics of different ethnic groups and their psychological conditions because the usage of language varies significantly in different regions [11]. ‘cue’ also incorporates some Chinese social features in the process of semantic changes, making it completely different from the commonly used meaning of ‘cue’ in Western society. For its great effectiveness and territoriality, the buzzword is “a mirror of our times.” [12]. Therefore, it is unreasonable to discuss buzzwords apart from the times and areas.

On the contrary, combining elements from both Anglophone (English-speaking) and Chinese linguistic and cultural backgrounds, buzzwords like ‘cue’ can be regarded as a kind of “Anglo-Chinese style expression” that involves using English words or phrases influenced by Chinese language and culture, or using Chinese words or phrases influenced by English language and culture [2].

In China, according to Li, W., internet buzzwords have become an indispensable part of Chinese netizens’ verbal repertoire [13]. There have been some key features in these emerging buzzwords integrated into Chinese daily language successfully. It reflects the essence of the continuous development of internet buzzwords, which epitomize the contemporary social and mental state of digital natives in China and the dynamics of language in the digital age.

1.2. Research question

The concept of “digital native” was popularized by Prensky, M. [14]. Digital native refers to the people who are native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games, and the Internet. Built on the basis of modern computer and network technology, buzzwords nowadays are ubiquitous on the internet, determining their inseparability with digital natives who have grown up immersed in the digital age and become increasingly intertwined with linguistic innovations.

However, digital natives come to be a diverse group of their attitudes towards technology instead of being all equal. While most digital natives are proficient in operating electronic devices of their being born around technology, others fail to have a knack for technology or even an inclination to learn something new in digital [15]. Therefore, they may have different capacities towards buzzwords, which is one of the network derivatives. With a particular focus on the term ‘cue’, the study delves into a fascinating question: Are there differences between different types of digital natives’ ability to comprehend the cultural meanings and social contexts behind ‘cue’ when using it?

The research background has already mentioned the de-terminologization of buzzwords, but when buzzwords represented by ‘cue’ are generalized to common speech, the impact of their popularity on the vocabulary competence of digital natives is also a question worth considering. Therefore, the paper explores the relationship between the popularity of buzzwords like ‘cue’ on the Internet and buzzword users’ vocabulary capacity.

1.3. The significance and value of research

Past research proved that the digital natives community encompasses a variety of individuals who have differences in digital experiences and cultural exposure. By examining how different types of digital natives interpret and use the popular term ‘cue’, this study helps to gain a deeper understanding of how digital culture affects language understanding. Besides, their online preference and digital identity construction are expected to learn because internet buzzwords often align with specific social groups and cultural circles.

In today’s digital society, internet buzzwords like ‘cue’ are highly popularity among social media platforms. However, even though a series of research projects have discussed the derivation and generalization of buzzwords, the extent to which such usage influences the vocabulary competence of buzzword users in digital natives and the nature of this impart remain largely unexplored. Aim at doing something helpful in addressing this gap, this research provides a new perspective on how digital culture shapes individuals’ way of thought and communication in the linguistic dimension. Meanwhile, this study contributes to a better comprehension of how language adapts to new communication environments and societal changes. Moreover, this study will be helpful in the discovery of the relationship between digital literacy and language proficiency by analyzing whether

digital natives equipped with buzzwords have much higher vocabulary levels and capacity to use words.

2. Methodology and Research Design

2.1. Sampling Frame

According to Zur, O., & Zur, A., digital natives can be divided into three major groups—avoiders, minimalists, and enthusiastic participants [15]. Avoiders have no affinity for digital technology, so they try to stay away from social media even if they were born in digital like their peers. Minimalists know that technology has been a part of the world today unavoidably, so they will try to engage with it but only when necessary in their opinions. However, enthusiastic participants in digital natives enjoy and thrive on digital technology. They regard it as a way of recreation, so they will be online as much as possible,

To construct an appropriate sampling frame, a screening questionnaire will be employed to identify which type of digital natives they are.

The questionnaire in this paper is mainly inspired by GVVU's WWW User Survey Team, Ann, S., and Peter P., including questions about their technology usage and digital preference [16]. Questions about age are added to determine if they are within the digital native community (Born after 1980) defined by Prensky, as well as a key question based on Zur, O., & Zur, A.'s theory of group perception of digital natives [14]. This screening questionnaire will be spread on the WeChat platform where the majority of users are Chinese digital natives by sending it to friends and family first and then spreading it by a snowballing method, making responses from over 150 people collected.

According to the questionnaire responses, we will be able to gather information about their digital usage situation and then identify the most relevant individuals representing avoiders, minimalists, and enthusiastic participants and then select a few samples for in-depth investigation. This ensures that the sampling frame of this study is more accurate, making the results of the study more representative.

2.2. Participants

Nine interview participants will be selected from over 150 screening questionnaire respondents. Quota sampling ensures that all respondents will be divided into 3 groups (avoiders, minimalists, and enthusiastic participants) with 3 samples randomly selected in each group. Then the semi-structured interviews will be used to learn about their comprehension of the cultural meanings and social contexts behind the buzzword 'cue.' The work will conduct face-to-face interviews with 9 participants one by one in the group study studio of the public library, without appearing overly formal or casual. English proficiency will not be considered in the sample selection, so the language form of the interview will be Mandarin standardized for communication fluency as well as reducing the emotional distance. Each interview will last for 5 to 10 minutes, so it may take 3 days to finish the whole interview process. There will be 1 interviewee each morning and 2 interviewees each afternoon, according to the plan.

In a few days, these participants will be gathered again as a focus group to explore the second question of the study: What is the relationship between the popularity of buzzwords like 'cue' on the Internet and buzzword users' vocabulary competence? After an ice-break activity to create a relaxing atmosphere, some questions will be proposed to guide their discussion. Group members will be encouraged to exchange their perspectives and have in-depth discussions about this relationship. This process will last for an hour, followed by a summary and acknowledgment of the key insights and ideas from the discussion.

2.3. Materials

A pilot study will be carried out on a class WeChat group (around 30 students) before spreading the screening questionnaires (see Appendix 1) [17]. Then, some adjustments will be made according to the result of the pilot study.

The interview of the selected samples will be semi-structured, following the scheme shown in Appendix 2, but also flexible and adaptable to make participants feel free to proactively propose interesting ideas useful for data collection [18]. If participants express that they have never heard of buzzwords like ‘cue,’ there will be a question left for them: As an internet native who seldom uses buzzwords, how do you view the popularity of these buzzwords or the frequent use of buzzwords by your peers? Those passionate about this type of internet buzzwords and even engage in works related to the spread of buzzwords will be asked to answer, ‘Have you ever created new social contexts of using words like ‘cue.’ Finally, participants must know if they have additional perspectives on internet buzzwords.

The focus group comprises different types of digital natives (3 avoiders, 3 minimalists, and 3 enthusiastic participants) to make the collected data more diverse and objective. Related to internet buzzwords, the Ice-break activities before the group discussion will be held to make the participants start their thinking of discussing the topic quickly. Participants will be allowed to chat freely or add contact information during this process because a harmonious relationship between group members is beneficial for the later in-depth discussions. The questions discussed in the focus group are detailed in Appendix 3. Question 1 first presents the research question in a straightforward manner to gain their initial impression of the research topic without any guidance. Question 2 tends to inquire about the impact of vocabulary competence on buzzword usage, while question 3 focuses on how buzzword usage influences users’ vocabulary capacity. Questions 4 and 5 are further expansions of question 3. However, due to the uncertainty of group members’ answers, these questions are not fixed and can be adjusted anytime in form and content based on their reactions.

The interviews and focus group discussion will be audio-recorded and allocated for analysis. The interviewer or the moderator may sometimes offer some prompts, such as “Can you explain this in detail?” to obtain more comprehensive data.

2.4. Ethics

Participants will be informed of the possible risks, such as information disclosure and that they could interrupt the interview or quit the discussion at any time. Each participant will sign a consent form and receive a book stipend for engaging in a 5-10 min interview and this focus group. If the sample included minors, prior consent will be obtained from their guardians.

3. Conclusion

3.1. Summary

This study aims to explore the differences in the use of the popular word ‘cue’ among Chinese digital natives with varying degrees of familiarity with digital technology, as well as the relationship between the use of this kind of buzzword and vocabulary competence to provide new insights into language acquisition in the digital age. By employing semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, the paper will help gain a deeper understanding of the perception of ‘cue’ among digital natives in a digital social environment and the impact of personal network preferences and the attitude towards buzzwords, as well as whether there is a correlation between Buzzword and vocabulary capacity. Through in-depth interaction with participants. This study is expected to fill the gap in existing

literature on the relationship between digital natives' vocabulary competence and buzzword usage, providing a new perspective for educational, social, and cultural research.

3.2. Difficulties and possible solutions

It will be difficult for us to gather data about 'avoiders' as they hardly use digital platforms so it may be necessary to expand the sampling frame in the process of spreading the screening questionnaires. Meanwhile, the sample size is not large enough to represent the whole group of people. The form of interviews and focus group discussions will be used to explore the phenomenon of using internet buzzwords, which could give us more in-depth insights about the topic. However, it is challenging to gather all participants together for a focus group. Certain cases will occur when participants are too shy to express their opinions publicly. Besides, there is a lot of information about the vocabulary competence of Chinese Buzzword users that only exists on social media and fails to have authority. Therefore, there may be some obstacles in collecting literature in this area.

3.3. Limitation

The use of 'snowballing' is much more time-saving; however, the sample may lack geographical diversity in such a case. Besides, the research only focuses on internet buzzword use, which cannot represent the oral use of buzzwords. However, it could be a scope of studying internet buzzword use in oral communication. Bias is unavoidable: Participant bias could be caused by uncertainty of identifying themselves, while interviewers may have personal research bias in the process of interview as being a minimalist or enthusiastic participant. Moreover, Buzzwords can not be deprived of effectiveness, so new buzzwords will appear continuously with old buzzwords fading, and examples of the buzzwords in research could be outdated.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1. Screening Questionnaire

1 Age	0-20 20-40 40-60 60+
2 Occupation	Work with internet Work has nothing to do with internet
3 On average, how often do you use your WWW browser? By this, we mean using your browser for a specific set of tasks or activities. We do not mean how many time you launch your browser per day?	More than 9 times/day 5-8 times/day 1 to 4 times/day A few times a week Once a week Once a month
4 How many hours per day do you use your electronic devices for fun/play?	Less than 1 1 to 2 hours 3 to 5 hours Over 5 hours
5 How many hours per day do you use your electronic devices for study/job?	Less than 1 1 to 2 hours 3 to 5 hours Over 5 hours
6 Which of the following do you think you belong to?	Avoider: use electronic devices just for keeping contact with others and try to stay away from social media Minimalist: have social media accounts and will use digital technology when necessary but they have no interest in it and will never regard it as a way for enjoyment Enthusiastic participant: enjoy the digital technology and always talk about its development
7 What do you primarily use internet for (Please check all that apply)	Education Shopping/gather product information Entertainment Communication with others Work/Business Gathering information for personal need Wasting time

8 What events do you often express your opinions on internet (Please check all that apply)

Others _____

Social hot points

Entertainment news

Topic related to your experience life or work

Others _____

Never

Appendix 2. Semi-structured Interview

Opening question

Our research is focused on the use of internet buzzwords, and this interview is to understand digital natives perceptions of using internet buzzword. You can terminate the interview at any time. We would like to get consent to record our interviewing by audio recorder. All the data would be recorded anonymously, the data would be only used on our research purposes. And the potential risk is the leak of data. Would you agree to carry on the interview? Could you tell me how often you use the digital platform?

Content question

1. Have you heard of word 'cue' or other words like 'cue' on internet? (if no, go to Q5)
2. How often do you use words like 'cue' on internet? If you use the word, can you give a few examples of scenarios where you use it?
3. If you used, could you understand the meaning of it? And could you distinguish in what occasions can or cannot use internet buzzword?
4. In your interactions with different types of digital natives, have you noticed any interest in the cultural meaning and social context of "cue"? Did they refer to these aspects in their interactions?
5. (If you haven't heard of them) What do you think about the use of buzzwords on the internet these days?
6. (For people work with or have interests in digital) Have you ever created new social contexts of using words like 'cue'?

Final question

Do you have any other thoughts about the interview that you would like to share with us?

Appendix 3. Guiding questions of the focus group discussions

Question 1: In your experiences, is there a relationship between the use of buzzwords and a person's vocabulary? Why?

Question 2: Do you feel that using buzzwords requires a certain amount of vocabulary support? Why?

Question 3: Has your vocabulary capacity to use vocabulary changed in any way after the popularity of the internet buzzword compared to before? What do you think has caused this change?

Question 4: When you use these buzzwords, do you feel you are still using a foreign expression or do you just regard it as a tool you have mastered to express your momentary feelings?

Question 5: When you use this kind of buzzword, do you aware that there are Chinese words with the same meaning that can be used, or do you have difficult finding a Chinese word with the same meaning to replace this buzzword?