



Re-skilling Language Learners for a Mobile World

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In the March 22, 1876 issue of *New York Times*, a review of the telephone highlighted its potential for widely distributing entertainment, noting that "By means of this remarkable instrument, a man can have the Italian opera, the Federal Congress, and his favorite preacher laid on his own house" (www.earlyradiohistory.us/sec003.htm). Yet for over a hundred years, the telephone was principally used for two-way voice conversations.

On the other hand, radio, which started out with two-way and shortwave transmission to enable individuals to talk to each other, soon morphed into a massive entertainment industry.

Now, ironically, the 1876 prediction in the *New York Times* has finally been realized as the telephone, in the guise of a cell phone, opens up a world of entertainment, news and features. Similarly, who could have imagined the power of an iPad when the first IBM computer was released in 1953?

All of which is to say, in this paper Agnes Kukulska-Hulme is addressing a topic still more or less in its infancy. The use of mobile technology in education and specifically in language education is an exciting development, doubtless with enormous untapped and unimagined potential.

Kukulska-Hulme addresses the mobile language learning environment head on when she states, "...the future of communication in foreign languages is intertwined with the future of communications technology and the evolution of languages in response to a new means of self-expression and interaction on the internet." For me, key words are *future*, *evolution* and *interaction*.

In a sense, these words define language learning methodology over the last 50 years. In meeting the needs of a globalized future as it quickly becomes the present, language teaching has evolved along more and more interactive lines. Social media is a natural environment for this trend to continue. And social media largely operates in the domain of mobile devices. Kukulska-Hulme provides ample evidence and commentary on the trend to capitalize on mobile learning, leading to "reconceptualizations of learning materials, approaches and practices." An aspect of these developments is the "learn anywhere" phenomenon, which has led to more and more "flipped classes," where lectures are viewed online at home – or anywhere, and often on mobile devices – while class time is devoted to discussion and interactive projects.

It is also interesting to note that it is the nature of young people to expect their content to be available more or less equally on all their devices. This affordance frees the learner from the constraint of both a geographical classroom and "the bell" (the signal for the end of class or an exam when the student is not ready). Kukulska-Hulme notes the implications of these expectations for language educators as well as policy makers.



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Through this series of MLL papers, TIRF is bringing to a wider audience a discussion of what seems to be a fundamental shift in the notion of “education.” For centuries, the education dynamic consisted of a teacher and pupils in physical proximity. Those boundaries have been broken. The roles of both teacher and learner have shifted. Knowledge that once came only from a teacher is now widely available on the internet. The community of the classroom is emulated in the social media world. Learners learn from a variety of sources. Kukulska-Hulme addresses the challenges language educators are facing as they seek to reconcile these elements in an ever-changing technological landscape.