[Re-skilling Language Learners for a Mobile World](#)
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As classes began on the first day at my new job as an ESL instructor at the University of Dayton, I asked all my students to put away their cell phones. After we came back from a break, I repeated my request. It did not take long before I realized that nearly all of my students in all of my classes had smart phones or tablets or both, and that they brought them to class every day, and, most importantly, that they seemed to enjoy using them

Mobile technology is a swiftly moving wave gaining size and momentum as it races towards classrooms around the world. The number of mobile devices students will have in five years or even two years will only increase, but will students have the skills needed to recognize and harness the language-learning potential of the powerful devices in their pockets or backpacks?

 Kukulska-Hulme's paper on re-skilling language learners for a mobile world, as with all of her research, is on the crest of the aforementioned wave. In addition, as the title suggests, her paper provides helpful information on the skills students will need to turn their mobile devices into active affordances to enhance language learning.

One important point that Kukulska-Hulme makes in her article is the need for an incremental approach to pedagogical uses of mobile technology. Pearson and Gallagher (1983) showed the importance of gradually shifting the responsibility of learning from the teacher to the student. Their research was based on primary school classrooms, but their lessons are especially applicable to language classrooms. Because many devices are intuitive and user friendly, it is easy for a teacher to assume that all applications are intuitive as well. The idea of instructing students on how to use new software and slowly increasing the frequency and complexity of use is an excellent point, and one that I feel has been overlooked in much of the MALL literature.

Kukulska-Hulme's suggestion that students need to ask their teachers and one another about how everyday activities performed on mobile devices can improve the quality and breadth of language learning also caught my attention. I agree whole heartedly with the importance of an environment which supports autonomy and encourages asking questions, but wonder if it is the teachers who should be asking the students and other teachers the same question. I do not imply that teachers are unskilled at using mobile technology as a means of designing tasks, enhancing pedagogy, or delivering lessons. Rather, students are currently more likely to be digital natives than their teachers, which may make it easier for the former to inform latter about the technology they both hope to utilize.

I will add one final comment, which is an agreement with the concern expressed by Sockett (2013) and echoed by Kukulska-Hulme, that the language acquisition that results from MALL requires further research. When I first began using MALL in my classes, I was so excited to try new activities with mobile devices that I almost overlooked the need to assess those activities. The more time I spent designing activities and follow up assessments, the more I realized how challenging the latter could be. As a result, I began to scale back what started as an overeager attempt to use MALL as much as possible. MALL is

attractive because it is ubiquitous, but to be used effectively it requires time, training, trial and error, and connections to curricula and course goals.

Kukulska-Hulme's paper, along with her and others' research, is truly cutting-edge and is paving the way for future research in a young but quickly developing subfield of computer assisted language learning, mobile learning, and education in general. I believe that language teachers who do not embrace mobile technology will remain disconnected from their students and will miss opportunities to increase opportunities for learning both in and out of the classroom.

Organizations like TIRF are performing a great service to language education by commissioning articles on cutting-edge themes such as MALL. I hope that TIRF and others will continue to support research efforts on cutting-edge topics, and that materials developers will begin to make resources more mobile accessible. The world truly is a classroom and with mobile technology, it is a classroom that may be tapped at any time – with the right skills.

References

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