Chapter XXV
Mobile 2.0 and Mobile Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the concept of Mobile 2.0, a mobile version of Web 2.0, and its application to language learning. The chapter addresses the following questions: What is Mobile 2.0? How is it relevant to the concept of Web 2.0? Is Mobile 2.0 ready for language learning analogous to that of Web 2.0? How is the efficacy of m-learning using Mobile 2.0 technology compared to PC Web 2.0? If Mobile 2.0 is appropriate for language learning, then how does one go about setting up a Mobile 2.0 site? Is Mobile 2.0 leading to a transformation of mLearning? Are there any limitations in using Mobile 2.0 for language learning? Finally, is Mobile 3.0 already emerging for learning? These issues will be discussed, and the relevant data will be presented to support the claims made in this chapter. Furthermore, specific examples of Mobile 2.0 and the empirical data of specific uses of mobile phones for educational purposes, especially for language learning in Japan, will be delineated. This chapter suggests that knowledge of Mobile 2.0 will strengthen and reinforce language teaching and allow students to learn more ubiquitously, more effectively, and in a way that is more at ease with their learning styles.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will describe the notion of Mobile 2.0, which essentially is Web 2.0 on mobile handsets, and the implications for language learning. It will provide definitions, current developments in Mobile 2.0, and how Mobile 2.0 applies to language learning. The final section of the chapter will focus on the future and implications of Mobile 3.0.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: following an introduction to the field, the background of the existing research on Mobile 2.0 is outlined,
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and a definition of Mobile 2.0, and its relationship to Web 2.0 is provided. The next section discusses several Mobile 2.0 phenomena that have recently been seen in the realm of business, and their possible applications to the field of language learning. Some examples of existing Mobile 2.0 sites will then be outlined, and ideas for using these mobile phone oriented sites for language learning purposes are given. Next, the chapter discusses some of the technical details for constructing one’s own Mobile 2.0 sites for teaching, while considering the economics of creating them. This leads to a discussion of exactly how Mobile 2.0 brings about a new trend in mLearning and provides an explanation of how a transformation in mLearning will occur. Finally, some drawbacks of Mobile 2.0 technologies for learning purposes will be delineated.

In this chapter, we are primarily concerned with mobile phones, the most commonly carried and used handheld device. There are many other handheld devices which have the potential to supply language learners with the opportunity to learn ubiquitously, such as Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), smartphones (a combination of mobile phones and PDAs), MP3/MP4 players, iPods, IC-recorders/players, portable radios, tablet PCs, portable DVD players, and digital dictionaries. However, with the ever-improving development of mobile phone technologies, the dividing line between mobile phones, smartphones and PDAs is becoming blurred, and it will soon be difficult to differentiate between them, as mobile phones will be able to build on most of the functions of these other devices in the near future (Trinder, 2005).

BACKGROUND

Technological Background of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

In the last decade, mobile phone technology has witnessed incredible developments in technology: from analog to digital and from plain and simple mobile phones to the current 3G smartphones which can serve as mini-computers, telephones, radios, televisions and cameras. This rise in technology has been so monumental that it is outpacing the devices that are currently on the market.

In Japan, as of September of 2007, the number of contracts with mobile phone companies (mainly NTT DoCoMo, au-KDDI, Softbank and EMObILE) was 99,333,600 (Japan Telecommunication Carriers Association, 2007), which is roughly 79% of Japan’s population. China, the largest mobile phone market in the world, had 508 million mobile phone users as of July, 2007 (Ministry of Information and Industry of the People’s Republic of China, 2007). When coupled with other formats of mobile devices, such a large figure has created an enormous number of potential language learners who can learn anytime and anywhere.

As impressive as the increasing numbers of mobile phone users are, equally surprising is the development in the wireless telecommunications infrastructure and mobile device manufacturing technology. Since 2004 in Japan, mobile phone networks have been completely transformed into 3G, which allows the transmission of 384 kbit/s for mobile systems and 2 Mb/s for stationary systems. Currently, 75% of Japanese mobile phone users are using 3G services (Mobile White Book, 2007). Infrared, Wi-Fi, WiMAX and Bluetooth technology enable data communication between mobile phones and other digital devices. In the case of Japan, all mobile phones have Internet connectivity capabilities. Furthermore, of the 508 million mobile phones users in China, about 50.4 million are active Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) users (CNNIC Report, 2008).

The use of the Internet has become commonplace for most mobile phone users, enabling ubiquitous access to email, music, news, e-books, e-animation, blogs, online tickets, shopping, and auctions. In addition to the Internet, mobile phone users can access FM radio, mobile TV, and Global Positioning System (GPS) services. Putting aside

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