Chapter 6
Insights from Mobile Phone Voice Communication

INTRODUCTION

Mobile phone communication as an instance of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has not received as much attention as email and others. Indeed, it may be argued that it is not a typical instance of CMC as some people do not consider the mobile phone a computer and also because there is hardly any Internet Protocol (IP) address involved in sending SMS, one might claim. However, as has been mentioned by writers like Prensky (2004) the mobile phone has reached such sophistication that it is indeed more powerful than some computers in terms of processing power, and indeed internet facilities are easily incorporated into mobile phones. While many have studied email and its effects on writing and the school curriculum, among other issues (e.g. Abdullah 1998, 2003, Akers-Jordan 2002, Baron 2001, Crystal

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2001, Healey 2007, etc), little has been done on the mobile phone until now (but see Bodomo 2003, 2007, Bodomo and Lee 2002, Thurlow 2003 and Prensky 2004). This chapter and the next focus particularly on the use of mobile phones through case studies based on reports of completed research projects. There are, at least, two aspects of mobile phone communication, voice mobile phone communication and text messaging. Chapter 6 focuses mainly on voice mobile phone communication aspects while chapter 7 dwells on mobile phone texting, especially its grammatical aspects.

CASE STUDY

In this chapter, I shall mainly report on a study of mobile phone voice communication by a group of people in Hong Kong, as a way of giving us an insight into the way the mobile phone, which has become one of the most important CMC tools of our time, is being used. I shall draw in background information, data, questionnaire, analysis, and activities from a funded research project which was indeed one of the first projects in Hong Kong, if not worldwide, dedicated to understanding the way language is used through the medium of mobile phone communication.1

Background Information

The mobile phone is one of the most revolutionary tools or media of communication in recent times. The pervasive use of mobile phones in society may be the basis of new ways of using language in phone conversations. Mobile phone usage in Hong Kong began in the late 1980s. Since the mid-1990s, the penetration rate has grown enormously as more service providers joined the market, thus leading to lower service charges2. For instance, the penetration rate has increased from 20% in 1997 to 80% in 2001. In addition, a report in as early as March 2002 even shows that approximately 98% of people aged 20 to 29 in Hong Kong owned a mobile phone3. In Asia, Hong Kong has the highest levels of personal penetration of mobile telephones and has maintained that position over years (ACNielsen, 2001)

In this case study of mobile phone voice communication, I focus on the use of ‘Mobile phone Cantonese’ in Hong Kong, which refers to a set of distinctive forms of Cantonese expressions that are associated with communication through the mobile phone. It shares features of general telephone language, but some are distinctive or have different degrees of occurrence.

As part of the research project on mobile phones mentioned above, an informal study was carried out among students in a Language and Literacy class taught by
The Emergence of Social Presence in Learning Communities
Handbook of Research on E-Learning Methodologies for Language Acquisition (pp. 22-38).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/emergence-social-presence-learning-communities/20019?camid=4v1a