Chapter 5
Challenges of Adopting Web 2.0 and Mobile 2.0 for Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

Podcasts, blogs, and wikis are the best-liked Web 2.0 services used by language teachers for homework assignments or special projects. Although these services sound promising, the potential challenges to their use should not be overlooked. This chapter discusses challenges, including economic aspects, technical support and training, pedagogy and teachers’ roles, and feedback and evaluation. Suggestions are also provided to resolve the concerns. Detailed introductions of podcasts, wikis, blogs, Web 2.0, and Mobile 2.0 are presented, along with analysis of geographic users’ learning styles and characteristics. Mobile technology to assist language learning is also explored.

INTRODUCTION

Web 2.0 (i.e. Facebook®, YouTube®, Twitter®, etc.) has become a universal phenomenon and is eclipsing the one-way (regular) information distribution website. Web 2.0 allows “users to connect with one another” (“Web 3.0 and beyond,” 2007, para. 10). Its two-way interaction and participation capabilities make Web 2.0 ideal for language teaching and learning in the classroom and beyond. According to Jon Stewart, Nielsen’s research director for technology and research, the fastest-growing activities on the World Wide Web are social networking, news checking, and searching (Stewart, 2009). Interactive features, versatile web applications, easily created web pages, and constant improvement have made Web 2.0 into a vital part of Web society. Among all Web 2.0 services, podcasts, blogs, and wikis are the most popular learning and instruction tools.

Another recent phenomenon is the rise of handheld devices. Mobile devices and smartphones are in use around the world, especially in Asian countries. Smartphones, which are mobile phones with operating systems, afford both computer-like features and versatile functionalities (e.g.,...
emails, internet, etc.). They are mini-computers that can be easily carried in a pocket. Smartphone users can access a variety of applications and can network anywhere, anytime. The new term, Mobile 2.0, has been created to represent “Web 2.0 on mobile handsets” (Wang & Heffernan, 2009, p. 472). Mobile 2.0 enables mobile learning through Web 2.0 social networking, interaction, and collaboration in mobile devices. Pieri and Diamantini (2009) defined mobile learning as “a modality of distribution of any learning content with portable devices such as the personal digital assistant (PDA), tablet PC, e-book, and mobile phones” (p. 184). Mobile learning, both formal and informal, has experienced swift growth.

Accompanied by 4G or Wireless Broadband Access (i.e. WiMAX) technologies, the newest mobile phone networks allow faster data transmission, thereby affording user access to radio, GPS, camera, TV programs, websites, and email at any time and place. Mobile technology has rapidly progressed, especially in Asian countries such as Japan and China (Wang & Heffernan, 2009). Wang and Heffernan (2009) noted that Mobile 2.0 focuses more on user-led services than PC Web 2.0, which makes m-learning more personal and spontaneous. With the swift development of mobile technology, users may expect to see more user- and learner-friendly devices which will become necessities for daily life and learning. But while mobile technology is spreading widely and academic podcasts can be accessed at any time, are users around the world ready to use mobile devices to assist learning? This chapter discusses user characteristics, pedagogical approaches, mobile technology, and potential future developments. The chapter will

• provide an in-depth description of podcasts, along with wikis and blogs. Mobile 2.0 will then be discussed, along with introduction of portable and mobile devices (e.g., smartphones, tablet PCs, etc.) which can be utilized for podcasts, blogs, and wikis.
• analyze geographic users’ characteristics, culture, lifestyles, learning habits, and behaviors, versus the features and functionality of Web 2.0 and Mobile 2.0. An overview of the challenges of integrating learners, instructors, and the cutting-edge tools/web environments will be included.
• present approaches for overcoming the pedagogical impacts and economic challenges which may arise, despite the promise and popularity of Mobile 2.0.
• preview the future development of Web 2.0 and Mobile 2.0 technologies to their full potential.

WEB 2.0 AND MOBILE 2.0

The amount of literature regarding the use of Web 2.0 and Mobile (Web) 2.0 to support formal and informal learning has rapidly increased. With the emerging popularity of Web 2.0, teachers, scholars, and students increasingly use these tools for learning and researching a variety of subjects. “Web 2.0 doesn’t have a hard boundary, but rather, a gravitational core” (O’Reilly, 2005, p. 1). The web became a platform which allowed for user participation and control of data (O’Reilly). Syndication of Web 2.0 (e.g., blog, wiki, Flickr®, Delicious®, podcast, etc.) transmits data sufficiently and brings current information to users. However, the most successful feature of Web 2.0 is its social networking, which provides interaction and collaboration (O’Reilly). O’Reilly mentioned that Google® was the pioneer by using the web as a platform and providing a powerful database with free service. Web 2.0 is a medium -- a gravitational core, as O’Reilly stated -- which not only provides service to core users but also reaches many more potential users through the creation and the active participation of primary users.