Chapter 9
Adapting the iPhone for Language Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will discuss ways in which the iPhone/iPod Touch can be used for language learning. The built-in functions of the iPhone/iPod Touch, along with the various Web Apps and Apps that can be used to enhance these functions, provide a wide variety of ways in which the iPhone/iPod Touch can be used in language learning. Some of these include built-in recording functions, cameras, handwriting recognition capabilities, as well as a huge array of helpful web-based applications and independent applications. Because this chapter could not possibly cover all the options that are available, it will briefly introduce some of these functions and applications and explore how they can be beneficial to language learners. In addition to this, this paper will ways in which applications useful for language learning or teaching can be searched for via Google Apps or the Apps store itself.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, languages have been taught in a face-to-face setting where the instructor introduces grammatical patterns and vocabulary to students who have access to a textbook, workbook, and lab materials. Things have begun to change as online teaching has become more and more common at the college-level. It is now not uncommon for languages to be taught in either an online or hybrid setting. Even so, beyond the Internet, the tools that are used for language teaching have not progressed too far beyond the additional use of the Internet and computers.

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This paper will look at the use of the iPhone and/or iPod Touch as new tools for language teaching. It will explore some of the various options available and how these options can be used in the classroom (face-to-face, hybrid, or online).

Previous Studies

Much research has been done on the effectiveness of the use of mobile devices for learning. To date, however, most of the focus has been on the use of laptop computers and PDAs with some interest in the use of mobile phones. For some, there is skepticism as to how well mobile phones or similar small devices can be used to improve learning. The focus, here, seems to be on size. Gianna Avellis, Antonio Scaramuzzi, and Anthony Finkelstein (2004) summarize it as follows:

“The small screen size of mobile devices... makes some people question their worth as e-learning delivery tools. Some... critics do point to the restricted input capabilities... of some of these devices, questioning students’ ability to enter large amounts of text into a device to take notes or answer an essay-type question.” (p. 15)

However, many research efforts have pointed to some of the benefits of using such technology. George M. Chinnery (2006) points out that, in using such devices, one needs to have an understanding of how to apply these devices to language learning. He says:

“... technologies, mobile or otherwise, can be instrumental in language instruction. Ultimately, though, they are not in and of themselves instructors; rather, they are instructional tools. And the effective use of any tool in language learning requires the thoughtful application of second language pedagogy.” (p. 9)

Again, Chinnery (2006) points to some of the limitations of using these devices. Specifically, he points to the following:

“Notwithstanding its benefits, MALL [Mobile Assisted Language Learning] also poses related challenges. For instance, inherent in the portability of mobile media are reduced screen sizes, limited audiovisual quality, virtual keyboarding and one-finger data entry, and limited power... Other potential drawbacks include limited nonverbal communications, limited message lengths, a lack of cultural context, and potentially limited social interaction.” (p. 13)

Agnes Kukulska-Hulme (2006) also points out that the use of mobile technologies is still rather new. She summarizes this as follows:

“We are still in the early days of the application of mobile technologies to language learning. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a number of early examples feature rather conventional approaches, reflected in activities that take some advantage of portability but do not yet appear to be exploiting the full range of potential. It seems that there is always a hunger for the comfortably familiar basics: typically, vocabulary and grammar, in the form of structured modules and exercises. Mobile devices are well suited to support these kinds of activity, whose value should not be dismissed, but mobile learning has far more to offer.” (p. 119)

Two devices that are relatively new to the Mobile Assisted Language Learning scene are the iPhone and iPod Touch. This paper will look at some of the possibilities that these two devices offer language teachers.

Difference between the iPhone and the iPod Touch

When comparing the latest models of the iPhone and the iPod Touch, one sees that, obviously,