Chapter 41
Learning With Mobiles in Developing Countries:
Technology, Language, and Literacy

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ABSTRACT

In the countries of the global South, the challenges of fixed infrastructure and environment, the apparent universality of mobile hardware, software and network technologies and the rhetoric of the global knowledge economy have slowed or impoverished the development of appropriate theoretical discourses to underpin learning with mobiles. This paper addresses one specific and fundamental component of such discourses, namely the role of language and literacy as they interact with mobile technology. The paper makes three points, that mobile technology is culturally and linguistically specific, not universal or culturally-neutral; that mobile technology does not merely store and transmit language(s) and literacy within communities, it disturbs and transforms them, and that the digital literacy agenda that might underpin learning with mobiles has not yet been developed in relation to mobile technology or in relation to the global South. These are the foundations of understanding learning with mobiles in the global South.

THE STORY SO FAR

We must start by looking back at the last decade or more of learning with mobiles in the developed countries, mainly and initially Western Europe, because this formed part of the expectations and experiences exported to developing countries in the global South. We can identify two contrasting paradigms of learning with mobiles, firstly, the 'mobile learning' movement of the research community. This paradigm, probably the dominant one over the first decade, can reasonably claim a number of achievements, those of extending learning, enriching learning, engaging learners, extending learning theories, adapting the theories of e-learning but essentially a Western European / North American account, in spite of Asia Pacific and South Africa outliers (Traxler 2013a). It was and is a research-driven and funding-driven community, under-pinned by the rhetoric and mechanics of innovation (Rogers 1995), working within

existing curricular, institutions, professions and ideas and based on the pedagogic and epistemological foundations of European modernism. Its foundational disciplines were computing, education and psychology as earlier espoused by e-learning and its aspirations and research agenda come from the same ancestry. It had the modernist imperative to generalize and theorise.

There is however also a second, an emergent and more subversive, paradigm in the global North. This paradigm portrays connection and mobility as defining characteristics our societies, arguing that this connection and mobility change attitudes, abilities, habits and expectations about how we can generate, transform, share, discuss, store and consume ideas, images, information and opinions. This has a rather different conception of learning with mobiles that resonates with post-modern notions of transience, fluidity, partiality, subjectivity and relativity (see Kirby, 2006 for a fairly comprehensive, ambitious and extreme exposition of this case.). It draws more on a loose and emergent 'sociology of mobilities' community (see for example Urry 2007) and incidentally argues that existing empirical methods are still rooted in stasis, exploring mobility merely as *freeze frames*, and that intrinsically mobile empirical techniques and attitudes are now needed (Buscher & Urry, 2009).

Somewhere between these extremes is the growing phenomenon of user-generated learning for mobiles, characterized by content, contexts, communities and conversations generated by learners for learners, often exploiting the affordances of mobile access to Web2.0 technologies. (Cook 2010)

There is also considerable use of mobiles in various ODL projects and institutions, not conceptualized or documented as mobile learning, a symptom of ongoing problems of definition.

These two extremes and the work in between have offered conflicting modes of learning with mobiles to the developing countries of the global South. These have provided the templates. Accepting them too readily does however critically ignore deeper issues. In the developing countries of the global South, we argue, as a generalization but in some senses also as a definition, that language and literacy are not as stable, as neutral and as homogeneous as they are in the mainstreams of the global North. They are nevertheless fundamental foundations to learning and are fundamental constituents of mobile traffic. They are central to any theorizing of learning with mobiles in developing countries and we feel that a fuller understanding of learning with mobiles in the global South can only proceed once the foundations are fully articulated and critiqued. We must of course recognise that the terms *Global South* and developing countries are problematic essentialisations and simplifications. They historically define the regions in question as materially or economically deficient and the remedy or response to be economic and material development, understood in the sense of catching up or modernisation. This has consequences for education and learning, seeing them as underpinning increases in, for example, gross domestic product or per capita income. Latterly specific models of mobile learning have been co-opted to support these objectives, driven by the international aid agencies' emphasis on scale and sustainability. This is worrying for marginal, nomadic and indigenous language communities, and for pedagogies other than didactic or transmissive, which are perceived as financially less efficient. At the same time, however, other parts of the international development community have started to espouse and operationalise the Capability Approach (Sen 1989), defined by choosing to focus upon the moral significance of individuals' capability of achieving the kind of lives they have reason to value. This implies the objectives and metrics of development are not solely material and "entails an evaluation of education that goes considerably beyond those based solely on outcome measures, such as numbers enrolled, test scores, or income". (Unterhalter et al., 2007, p. 4). In a purely material vision of development, the role of education is merely to service, support and optimise economic activity (and then increased economic activity might feed resources back into the education system). In the Capability Approach, "the educational process itself

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