



[Mobile Learning for Languages: Can the Past Speak to the Future?](#)

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Professor Traxler presents a coherent and provocative account of the evolving nature of society within and through the integration and implementation of mobile devices in human interaction and learning. Even as I sit in a small café on the outskirts of Beijing, I notice nine out of ten people have either a mobile phone or a tablet in their hand. This observation supports Traxler's (2013) assertion that "mobiles are becoming embodied or prosthetic, part of us, inseparable, umbilical cord to much that we now value, the last thing at night, the first thing in the morning" (p. 9). As a language teacher and teacher trainer in China, I must accept this new human "attachment" and learn how to take advantage of all of its possibilities. These opportunities include reaching out, enriching, learning from one another, theorizing and defining, enthusing and motivating. Adapting to this idea will create a pleasant, peaceful, and positive language learning experience.

The possibilities are just that – potentials. Although I acquiesce to Prof. Traxler's underlying assumption that it is possible to make language learning "more authentic, efficient, relevant, and effective by recognizing and responding to universal mobile technologies" (p. 2), I do not feel he showed *how* language learning can happen within this new environment. There is an underlying assumption throughout the paper of linear causality. If people have access to more language, then they will learn more language. Although such causal claims might be true in some fields of learning (e.g., physics – friction causes heat), I think it is important for us to identify and discuss how learning a language is different from learning other subjects such as math, history, and geography, for example. To begin this conversation from Traxler's general comments, I would like to add a specific example from language learning theory to classroom practices to support his view. The specific categories of focus will include "Mobile Learning - Enriching" and "Mobile Learning – Learning from one Another" (Traxler, 2013, p. 5).

My personal philosophy on learning a language stems from a sociocognitive perspective: conscious noticing (Schmidt, 1995), interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), and Swain's (2005) output hypothesis. Because I believe in these theories of language learning, I utilize an interactive group journal task in my advanced academic writing seminar for undergraduate English majors here in China.

An *interactive group journal* is "a written document that takes the idea of reflective practice and merges it with social interaction by recording active dialogue among peers in a journal format" (Cole, Raffier, Morgan, and Schleicher, 1998, p. 1). In order to write an interactive group journal, each group needed to decide on what (specific topics or tasks), how often, and in what format (paper, email, online, QQ – Chinese version of instant messenger, and etc.) they were going to write. Out of 17 groups, 100 percent chose QQ as the most appropriate format because they were able to read and respond anytime, anyplace, and as often as possible from their mobile phones, tablets, and laptops.

The journal was then "passed" around and written in daily by all members of the group, even though they averaged 30 hours of class each week! The students were extending the academic writing course timeframe, from the traditional two hours a week to many more hours. Not only were they editing and revising their own compositions with one another in their interactive group journals, but they were also



discussing from their mobile phones, tablets, and laptop computers the specific content of the course on a daily basis: how to write research papers in linguistics, teaching English as a foreign language, literature, and translation. This use of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in China does just as the acronym implies. It assists, not replaces, the learning process. MALL provided an avenue for my students to interact in the target language outside of class for meaningful purposes as well as learn from one another in and with the target language.

I believe Prof. Traxler (2013) has given us language professionals (whether we are educators, teacher trainers, program administrators, curriculum/materials developer, and/or learning/teaching researchers) a great foundation in understanding the current research on mobile learning and the reality of our changing society. Now, we can take these general ideas and adapt, change, and utilize them for our specific contexts. We should take action and do what teachers do best – share! Mobile learning is inevitable in today's global context and we need to think critically and realistically. But we must also remember that MALL is focused not on technology but on language learning.

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