

Cultivating a Conversational Vision for Mobile Language Learning with GenAI

Over the past two decades, the spread of mobile technologies has reshaped the landscape of language education. While many institutions continue to cultivate carefully structured approaches to mobile learning, informal out-of-class language learning has grown more freely, like wildflowers taking root beyond the borders of formal gardens. These self-seeding practices have diversified the ecology of language learning, revealing new forms of participation, creativity and autonomy. Into this already varied landscape, generative AI (GenAI) introduces another kind of seed: one that grows unpredictably through conversation. GenAI as a conversational medium extends the dialogic and interactionist foundations of language learning and invites reflection on what constitutes dialogue, understanding and learning. It also raises the question of what kinds of conversations people have throughout their increasingly mobile, extended and complex lives in changing societies. GenAI seems uniquely poised to respond to their personal, continuously evolving needs.

This presentation proposes a conversational vision of mobile language learning that connects several levels of dialogue: with AI systems, with objects and people in physical spaces, among learners within digital environments, and across the broader educational and societal conversations that shape language use. Drawing on traditions of dialogic learning and critical applied linguistics, we ask what kinds of conversations language educators, learners and technologies should be cultivating and whose voices are heard in these evolving ecologies. Finally, as with any ecosystem, growth is uneven. Research shows that while mobile learning has extended opportunities for many, disparities in access, representation and digital literacy risk creating new forms of exclusion. The challenge for language educators and researchers is to nurture a more inclusive and dialogically grounded future for GenAI-enabled mobile language learning.