

The Language Teacher

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A survey of mobile English language learners

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The purpose of this study was to use an app-embedded survey to profile language learner demographics. 3,759 EFL language learners from primarily eight L1 backgrounds (French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Thai) responded to the survey embedded within a popular English grammar app that has 500,000 downloads and over 100,000 active users. While presently there is very little concrete research on autonomous mobile language learning, it is hoped that this research will provide a methodological foundation for more in-depth research into learner habits and preferences.

本論の目的は、携帯アプリに組み込まれた調査結果を使用することにより、アプリを使用した言語学習者の実態を明らかにすることである。3,759人のEFL学習者（L1の内訳はフランス語、ドイツ語、イタリア語、日本語、韓国語、ロシア語、スペイン語、タイ語の8カ国語）が、ダウンロード数50万、アクティブユーザー数10万以上の人気の英文法アプリに組み込まれた質問項目に解答した。現時点では携帯電話を使用した自主的な言語学習に関する具体的研究はあまり見受けられないが、本論が携帯を使用した言語学習者の特性や傾向についての更なる研究の方法論的基礎となることを期待する。

Mobile devices have garnered much interest among language researchers in recent years due to the possibilities mobile assisted language learning (MALL) technologies hold for language learning (Burston, 2011; Godwin-Jones, 2011). One issue, however, is that while mobile devices are becoming more common, MALL is still in an emerging phase and there are many unanswered questions about how the mobile platform affects the way learners complete activities and make decisions (Stockwell, 2010). However, it is clear that in at least one area—mobile apps—developers and educators are already moving ahead, as shown by the growing number of language learning apps now available for the iOS and Android platforms. This paper's authors are also involved in developing several language learning apps

SIG Spotlight: CALL SIG

The JALT Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) SIG's primary purpose is to research and promote the use of technologies to facilitate language learning. The organization fosters research, issues publications such as the *JALTCALL Journal*, holds an annual, internationally recognized conference on technology in language learning, the JALTCALL Conference, and carries out other activities to further its aims and support its members.



for the Android platform. Their most popular one—a free English grammar quiz game—has received over 500,000 downloads to date. This large user base indicates a significant interest in self-study among learners and provides an excellent opportunity to conduct quantitative research to analyze learner demographics, habits, and preferences away from artificial academic environments and in more naturalistic settings (Stockwell, 2010). With this goal in mind, this paper's authors have embedded survey questions within the above-mentioned app to gather data on the users' age, gender, native language, and self-rated proficiency level. While this initial survey is somewhat limited in scope, the methodology used could provide a starting point for other developers and researchers to begin to identify the habits, preferences, and learning styles of these early adopters.

Literature review

To date the majority of MALL research has been conducted in academic settings (Stockwell, 2010). Kiernan and Aizawa (2004), Thornton and Houser (2005), and Stockwell (2007) explored ways to extend learning to students' cell phones. Chen, Li, and Chen (2007), and Ogata (2008) did an admirable job of setting up computer supported ubiquitous learning that dynamically supported the learner outside of the class.

However, with powerful, multi-featured smartphones and tablets becoming more widespread, MALL has now reached a point where, “guided by sound pedagogy, it can realize the promise of ultra-portable language learning” (Burston, 2011, p. 68). While advances in hardware usually get the most attention, Godwin-Jones (2011) mentions the equal importance of software and the new opportunities that arise from mobile application development. Recently there have been some studies focusing on how mobile apps are used and perceived by learners (Kim, Ilon, & Altmann, 2013; Steel, 2012), and some studies have also commented on app development and design (Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2011). Clearly MALL is an exciting area of research with many discoveries ahead.

Method

The primary tool of this research was a Google Docs survey placed within a free English grammar Android app. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the app has six graded levels from beginner to advanced, and allows the user to self-select their level. Over a period of three months, 3,739 users responded to the survey. As an initial study, the authors were mainly interested in general demographic information: age, gender, self-assessed English language level, and native language (L1).

Results

Table 1. Respondents’ age and gender

Age	Respondents		
	Total	Male (%)	Female (%)
0-14	13.19%	34	66
15-24	36.64%	54	46
25-34	28.54%	61	39
35-44	13.83%	64	36
45-54	5.51%	68	32
55-64	1.77%	59	41
65+	0.53%	65	35
Total	100%	56	44

As Table 1 shows, users between the ages of 15 and 34 were much more likely to complete the survey, with respondents under 25-years old comprising nearly half (49.8%) of the responses. Looking at gender, 56% of the total respondents were male. In fact, over the age of 14, males outnumbered female respondents in every age category. Interestingly, the sole exception was the youngest age group, where two thirds of respondents were female.

In order to survey the respondents’ language levels, six CEFR aligned categories were used: beginner, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced. Interestingly, the self-assessed ability levels of all ages are not distributed in the way one might expect from a typical population of language learners (see Figure 1). Instead, this paper’s data shows a respondent-level pyramid that is heavily skewed towards the beginner level, and also indicates that there are more advanced-level users of the app than upper-intermediate users (see Figure 2).

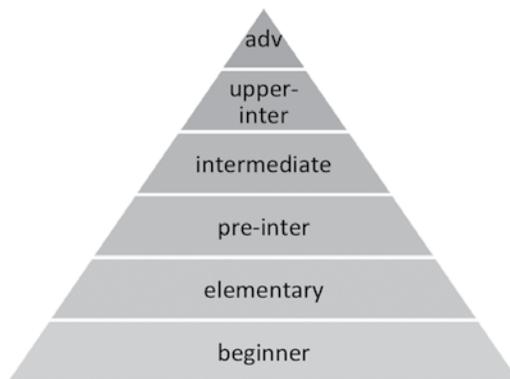


Figure 1. Classic learner pyramid

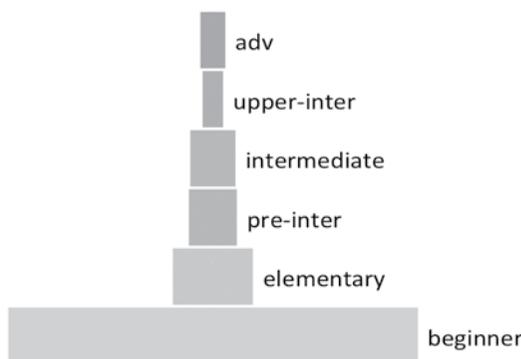


Figure 2. Respondents’ actual learner pyramid

Finally, the authors also looked at the correlation between respondents' L1 and gender, and the relationships between respondents' L1, gender, age, and language study level, which can be referenced in the original study (Byrne & Diem, 2014).

Discussion and conclusion

While this paper's data is somewhat limited in scope, it does allow for some interesting observations and assumptions about MALL user demographics as well as put forth more questions for future research. Overall, the present data shows that a typical user of the authors' English grammar app is very likely to be under 35 years of age, slightly more likely to be male than female, and almost certainly will be a beginner, or at least a lower-level learner of English. The most compelling statistic in the study was that roughly 64% of respondents considered themselves beginners and only 12% self-assessed as elementary. Although one might reasonably assume that the beginner level would be the largest group, the difference between the two groups is surprising. Within the beginner-level category, two age and gender groups stood out: teenage-to-early-20s females, and older, 30-to-40-year-old males. This indicates that app developers and educators might want to target the very lowest level, especially if development costs are an issue, and possibly create separate apps that appeal to adolescent females' and older males' interests.

While the emergence of MALL is giving learners more choices about what, when, where, and how they learn, this freeing from the traditional strictures of the classroom presents new challenges for educators and researchers wanting to assess autonomous learning outside of traditional educational settings. Embedded surveys and download statistics can provide a means to explore who learners are and how they interact with technology in non-classroom settings, which can lead to the creation of apps that better meet the needs of learners.

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Disclaimer

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The complicated art of parenting

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Although an increasing number of children are being raised bi-culturally and bilingually, there seems to be little unity in research on the successful “how” of it, especially for languages besides English. Most parents are left at the mercy of trial and error, resulting in varying levels of success. This article relates the visible effects of the one parent, one language (OPOL) method and shows how they vary depending on the time share of each parent with the child(ren). In addition, the article notes how differences in the parents' own upbringing can prove to be an unexpected obstacle. Even so, their ability to act as second-order observers can offer benefits to their children's evolving biculturalism and bilingualism. The author concludes by advocating a shift from a cognitive skill-focused education to developing the intrinsic character and willpower of children.

ますます多くの子どもが複合文化や2言語で育てられているが、特に英語以外の言語での効果的な子育て方法について、一貫性のある研究が少ないようだ。ほとんどの親は、自分たちで試行錯誤をして子育てし、その成果は様々である。本論は、親1人で1言語を話すというOPOL方法は目に見えて効果があることと、子ども（たち）とその親が接する時間の比によって効果が異なるという結果を示す。加えて、両親自身の育てられ方の相違が、思わぬ障害になり得ることも注視する。たとえそうであっても、各親の2次的観察者としての手腕は、複合文化・2言語で学んでいる子どもたちに恩恵を与えることができる。最後に著者は最近の研究に基づいた上で、能力に焦点を当てたスキル重視の教育より、子供に本来備わっている性格と意志力の形成がより重要であると提唱している。

From Flanders to Dazaifu

Throughout Japan, the shrine of Dazaifu Tenmangu is considered *the* place for mothers

SIG Spotlight: Bil SIG

The Bilingualism Special Interest Group's aim is to further research on bilingualism as it occurs in Japan. We also promote mutual support among our members through our newsletter (three time a year), academic publications, and an active email list and Facebook group.



to pray for their children to pass the entrance examination to their university of choice. This atmosphere of learning befits the topic. I am a native Belgian and my wife, Ayuko, is Japanese and grew up in Dazaifu. Before our first daughter was born, a student presented me with the book *Raising a Child to be Bilingual and Bicultural* by Steven Verrier. He and his wife subscribe to the one parent, one language (OPOL) approach to bilingual child raising, and he believes that consistency is key, noting that “if a child has always associated an individual with one particular language, it probably won't occur to the child to speak any other language to that individual” (2003, p. 66).

Since both Ayuko and I experienced a monocultural upbringing, the practical, firsthand advice the book provided seemed to make sense. As a result, from day one I spoke Flemish (which is similar to Dutch in the same way American