

Seeing, Understanding and Learning in a Mobile Age
Budapest, 28-30. April 2005

The Importance of Being Earnest: Playing Around with Mobile Phones

Viktor Bedő, junior researcher, Institute for Philosophical Research,
Hungarian Academy of Science
bedoviktor@phil-inst.hu

Abstract

It can not escape our notice that while mobile telephony became an evident part of everyday life, the frontline of new features and services is still dominated by never ending discussions and guessings. Some services may be considered ostentatious, in the case of some new services the question arises whether they are worth the money, other applications seem to become indispensable very quickly.

The unexpected popularity of SMS and the slower than expected diffusion of MMS - which is capable of sending richer content - is a banality, but a good example for the difficulty of forecasting the demands of users or the viability of a particular innovation. The first feedback about new services mostly comes after the time and money consuming introduction on the market. We can expect faster and more edifying feedbacks than the ones from the market in the framework of projects, where a developer community cooperates with artists for example. New devices, or those still under development may become toys in the artists' hands. . During their creative experiments or the conceptual usage a whole train of unplanned applications or features may emerge. One could say, that they can afford to think in a wider set of possibilities, hence they are not restricted by the rules of everyday usage. But it has to be recognized that this game with the gadgets can be something very earnest. Similarly certain cases – as using missed calls as beeping – are worth to be examined–, these which extend conventional possibilities and emerge and spread thank to the inventiveness of the user communities.

My presentation focuses on how we to understand these games, how to make their meaning tangible. While interpreting some examples I will rely on the *language games* of Wittgenstein. Originally the concept of language game refers to learning and using language, but in a broader terms it is applicable on other forms of communication or even activity. Wittgenstein does not introduce the concept of language game by giving a definition but by sketching one game situation after the other. While he is doing so he focuses on the questions what and under which conditions we consider something as a game, what it means to be lead by rules, and what makes a successful game. I will conceptualize my examples taken from mobile phone usage as a game situation in order to judge their success.