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Fast Language Learning: Being Able to Manage Projects in a Foreign Language within Two Month

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Abstract: In times of globalization, also workforce needs to be able to go global. This holds true especially for technical experts holding an exclusive expertise. Together with a global manufacturing company, we addressed the challenge of being able to send staff into foreign countries for managing technical projects in the foreign language. We developed a language learning concept that combines a language learning platform with conventional individual but virtually conducted coaching sessions. In our use case, we developed this concept for Spanish native speakers learning English. The results from the implementation showed that the majority of participants were able to uplift their English competency level as desired.

Keywords: Language Learning, learning technology, Duolingo, online classroom

1 Introduction

In times of globalization, also workforce needs to be able to go global. This holds true especially for technical experts holding an exclusive expertise. Together with a global manufacturing company, we addressed the challenge of being able to send staff into foreign countries for managing technical projects in the foreign language. Hence, we aimed at developing a concept in which employees can be acquire the required language skills for managing a technical project within two month. In our use case, we developed this concept for Spanish native speakers learning English.

Computer-assisted language learning encompasses a wide range of technologies like applications, online platforms or mobile devices with the goal to support and guide foreign language learning (Levy, 1997). However, research showed that motivation is key! (Vesselinov & Grego, 2012) showed that students who learned Spanish for personal interest

or for school performed much worse than students with a more focussed purpose. Providing sophisticated technologies for language learning also needs not only social activities to connect with colleagues but also learning on a regular or daily bases in order to provide effective and successful support. Such daily online task-based activities may increase the individual's language learning confidence and personal motivation (Henry & Marrs, 2015). Finally, language learning technologies alone are not enough to cover language learning activities like learning vocabulary, pronunciation, listening or conversations. (Finardi, Leao, & Amorim, 2016) stated that especially blended learning approaches achieve promising language learning results.

The goal, we present in this work, was to combine the status quo of language learning technology and pedagogical approaches to develop a suitable concept for fast language learning.

2 Procedure

For the development of the language learning concept, we started with a literature interview, continued with a comparison of online language learning platforms, and performed a series of expert interviews. Below, each of the steps is described in more detail:

Literature Review:

First we identified the language learning challenges arising from particular differences between the Spanish and English language (Strohman, 2012)): In Spanish, words are spelled exactly how they sound and have no “silent letters”, common pronunciation mistakes of Spanish learners, false cognates, i.e. words, that have a look and sound similar to English words but they have very different meaning, gender confusion or the order of the adjective and nouns.

Instructional tools are often used in settings where Hispanic learners have limited proficiency in English. Tools available on the web have so many different features that they can help teachers in instructing their students. “Examples of Web2.0 tools are blogs, photo and video sharing, social networking, wikis, and so on. These tools offer either or both synchronous, real-time communication and asynchronous, delayed communication, modes of interaction” (Gunn, 2011). This seems to be an excellent strategy for students who enjoy using technologies and on the other hand offers the possibility to continue learning in their spare time.

Technology Review:

In order to be able to select an efficient and effective online language-learning platform, a comparison of five different platforms is conducted. The platforms consist of Duolingo¹, Busuu², Babble³, Rocket Languages⁴ and Memrise⁵. All these platforms are compared along the following main characteristics:

1 <https://www.duolingo.com>

2 <https://www.busuu.com>

3 <https://www.babble.com>

4 <https://www.rocketlanguages.com>

5 <https://www.memrise.com>

- **Language Support:** Points out, if the platform supports Spanish natives to learning English. Furthermore, it indicates if there is support by professionals provided and the number of words (vocabulary) available for learning.
- **Motivational Tools:** Points out, if one of the following three motivational tools are available: progress tracking, gamification elements and receiving a certification.
- **Social Networking:** Summarizes the available options for linking to social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter.
- **Price:** Presents if the platform is freely available or if the platform is commercial.

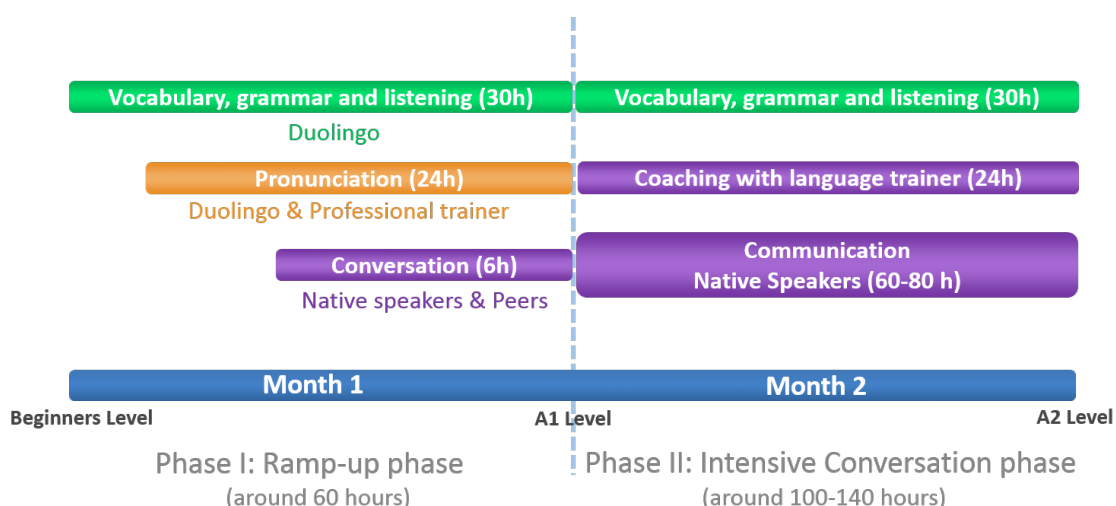
Expert Interviews

The goal of the interviews was to identify the current status of language learning and to extract best practices and approaches for fast language learning. Furthermore, we investigated the end users' attitude towards new innovative technologies suitable for enhancing and improving the fast language learning.

Altogether eight employees from a big industry company in Mexico participated in the interviews. Four of them were aged between 30-39 and the other four were aged between 40-49. Four of them belong to the Department of Production, three to the Department of HR and one was from the Department of Logistics. Five of the employees have participated in one to three different language trainings.

3 Language Learning Concept

Based on the insights from the technology review, our literature review and the interviews we propose a concept for fast language learning (in 2 month). The developed language learning concept consists of two phases: **Phase I: Ramp-up phase** (month 1) to reach level A1 and **Phase II: Intensive conversation phase** (month 2) to reach level A2 as depicted in Error: Reference source not found. Both phases need to be ergonomically coordinated so that a fast and effective language training can take place.



Phase I: Ramp-up phase (month 1)

The ramp-up phase consists of three closely interwoven pillars to complement each other of around 60 hours training to reach the language level A1:

1. Vocabulary, grammar and listening: The first pillar for learning a new language is to start with intensive vocabulary training, learning grammar and to be able to understand listenings. In order to achieve this the online platform Duolingo should be used as technological support and on a regular, daily base. Hence, we recommend to use Duolingo at least one hour a day (also on weekends) resulting in **30 hours** of language training in the first month.
2. Pronunciation training: The correct pronunciation is the second pillar for learning a language. Pronunciation should on the one hand be practiced with a pronunciation-training tool available in Duolingo and on the other hand together with a professional language trainer. We suggest 3 time a week 2 contact hours resulting in **24 hours** of training with the professional trainer for the first month.
3. Conversation training: The third and most important pillar of language learning is to do conversations. In the ramp-up phase these conversations can either be done with native peers from the target country or with colleagues of similar language competency level. The technology used for this conversation training does not matter e.g. Skype, TelCos or video conferences are feasible. Important is that the learners start practicing to speak and apply the new language in small conversations. We suggest for the last two weeks of the ramp-up phase a communication of together **at least 6 hours** with native speakers.

Intensive conversation phase (month 2)

The focus of the second phase is put on conversations as holding conversations on different topics is key for language learning. The goal for this phase is to improve the language skills from A1 to A2 and therefore 100-140 hours of training are needed. This phase is divided into the following two parts:

1. Keep training with Duolingo: To maintain the vocabulary and to repeat the grammar, we recommend to still Duolingo for reaching language level A2. Again we would recommend a minimal daily usage of 1 hour per day, resulting in **30 hours** for the second month.
2. Coaching with the language trainer: To be able hold conversations but also to get direct feedback and input on sentences or topics and formulations it is important to regularly talk with a professional language trainer. We suggest again 3 time a week 2 contact hours resulting in **24 hours** of training with the professional trainer for the second month.
3. Communication with native speakers: In order further practice conversations it is highly recommended to practice on a daily base with native speakers. Through this training the learner will become better at following and understanding a conversation and also be trained to reply fluently and in time. A daily conversation time between 3-4 hours is recommended, resulting in **60-80 hours** of training for the second month.

4 Conclusion and Outlook

The goal was to identify appropriate learning technologies for a quick (2 month) language training for technical project managers. We developed a language learning concept that combines a language learning platform with conventional individual but virtually conducted coaching sessions. The results from the implementation showed that the majority of

participants were able to uplift their English competency level as desired. Thereby, the motivation of the participants turned out to be crucial.

5 Literature

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