LINGOBEE: A MOBILE APP FOR IN-SITU LANGUAGE LEARNING

Lyn Pemberton
University of Brighton
Lewes Rd, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 4GJ, UK

Marcus Winter
University of Brighton
Lewes Rd, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 4GJ, UK

ABSTRACT

LingoBee is a mobile-phone app aimed at advanced language learners, developed as part of a nine partner EU Lifelong Learning Project. The demonstration and poster will show delegates how learners use the app to collect, annotate and share language- and culture-related items from the target language culture.

KEYWORDS
Informal learning, language, multimedia, social network

1. INTRODUCTION

Language learning has long been recognized as an area well suited to support from mobile devices, particularly informal learners [Kukulska-Hume, 2009; Kukulska-Hume & Shield, 2008]. Once immigrants and international students have gone through the formal language learning opportunities available to them, they often find that support for further learning is non-existent, and the community of practice formed by their fellow class members breaks up. Mobile learning networks offer an alternative to more traditional communities of learners [Traxler, 2010]. The SIMOLA EU Lifelong Learning project has developed a mobile Android app that encourages the continuation of active language learning by providing a simple but powerful tool for collecting and annotating items of linguistic and cultural interest in their target culture. These items are then shared with a new virtual community of interested fellow language e-learners via a common database, integrated with a range of social networking apps [Pemberton, Winter & Fallahkhair, 2009].

2. DESIGN AND FUNCTIONALITY

The app was developed following a learner-centred methodology, using participatory design workshops and rapid prototypes. An English-interface version was piloted with international students in the UK and design modifications made. The major issues at the pilot evaluation stage regarded the concerns of the (mainly far-Eastern) students about the value and reliability of user-generated content rather than the app’s functionality.
or usability. A further refined version was then developed with eight different interface language versions (English, Dutch, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Lithuanian and Norwegian).

Figure 1 illustrates the main functionality of the system (in a Norwegian example). After the welcome screen, with its synchronisation message, the user clicks on the vocabulary book icon to bring up a list of items created by herself and other users. She can look at her favourites (her own contributions plus those she has “favourited”) in alphabetical or chronological order. Alternatively she can view all the entries via the “heads” icon. One of the entries, the blueberry, has been illustrated with a photo by its contributor, while the rest are combinations of text, audio and web links.

Clicking on an item, in this case the top entry, brings up a full screen version, showing an automated text to speech function. The user can decide to enter a new version of the word, perhaps capturing a native pronunciation or clicking on the WWW icon to link to a Google search result for the word. This will then be available to all members of her user group, who can flag it to the administrator in case of an offensive or incorrect post, or rate it on a scale of 1-4, with the best liked items rising to the top of the list for that word.

Table 1. Screenshot for Norwegian language items

New user groups can be set up via a web site, and a user may skip between as many public groups as they like. Private groups can also be formed, e.g. for a specific school tri or other closed interest group.

3. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

LingoBee is currently being evaluated in six EU countries with a range of language learners including Erasmus students, immigrants and vocational students. We are working with partners to integrate the app into the practices of language schools and independent learners alike. On the one hand, this involves using the app in the context of formal language classes, such as those held by universities for Erasmus students, further education settings for vocational workers and also classes in international schools. Here we are most interested in the role of the app as a potential bridging device between the classroom and the lived experience of the learner in the foreign language setting. On the other, we are recruiting independent learners, e.g. immigrants, to use the app outside a formal learning setting: here the focus will be the development of communities of learners.
Further technological development will involve extending the range of interface languages but more importantly, developing iPhone and possibly Blackberry versions of the app.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The SIMOLA project was funded by the EU as part of its Lifelong Learning Programme in ICT LLP 511776-LLP-1-2010-1-UK-KA3-KA3MP. We gratefully acknowledge this support and the work of our project partners.

REFERENCES