

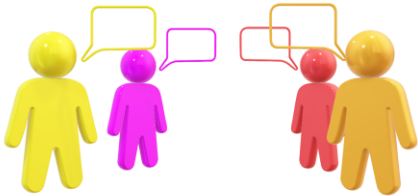
Learning to speak a foreign language through a mobile app

The potential of linguistic partners learning

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Executive summary

One of the most common reasons why people want to learn a language is to be able to communicate orally. Our team is interested in exploring the potential of creating a mobile application able to help people from all over the world improving their ability in speaking and having a conversation in a second language. We interviewed 5 language learners on their behaviors, pain points, preferences and motivations and how they use digital platforms to learn foreign languages.

Key findings

There is a widespread interest in learning a language through oral interaction and direct conversation with a second language speaker. Many products in the mobile apps market focus on written communication and random memorization of vocabulary. Users expressed a clear desire for an app to help them **find locally linguistic partners** to practice orally their linguistic knowledge and establish a linguistic and cultural exchange.

What did we want to learn?

My team want to learn more deeply about how and why language learners use existing online platforms to improve their second language/s and identify pain points and how they could be solved. We also wanted to find out how popular an app to find linguistic partners locally will be and get some insight about specific features and implementation that we could work on.

Key questions

Needs

- What is essential for language learners?
- Do users really need a language learning app specialized in oral conversation?

Behaviors

- How language learners use existing digital platforms ?
 - Which are useful features and pain points users identify in existing apps?

Participants

5 adult friends currently studying a language through language learning app from different countries

	Studying frequency	Platform they currently use	Languages they currently study
Participant 1	Every day	Babbel, Hello Talk, Tandem, Livemocha	Moroccan Arabic, Portuguese, Russian
Participant 2	3-5 times a week	Duo Lingo, Hello Talk	French and Italian
Participant 3	In the weekend (twice per week)	Duo Lingo, Conversation Exchange	French
Participant 4	Twice per week	Duo Lingo, Speakly, Glossika, Lingvist, Memorise, mango langauges	German
Participant 5	3-5 times per week	Duo Lingo, Hello Talk	English and french



Key finding 1

All the participants expressed a desire in finding a linguistic buddy with whom to interact by speaking (remotely or face-to-face)

Quotes

“

P3- You learn a language in practice, talking. When I establish a good connection with somebody, a strong human interaction, I have the possibility to expose my linguistic doubts to a native speaker and understand, for example, when to use a certain expression and how to use it in a sentence.

P1 - If I could meet my second language speaker in my city it will be wonderful, because this will enable me to bring the conversation to another level, to a much more practical level and observe face-to-face the way in which my buddy expresses himself at 360° involving gestures and all of the rest.

Recommendation

Language learners **main need** is finding a partner with which to establish a mutual exchange (I learn conversing with you my chosen second language ⇔ you learn conversing with me your chosen second language)

Several options for oral communication (videocall, phone call, audio message) already embedded in the app to make oral conversation easy.



Key finding 2

All the participants expressed a strong bond between language love and passion for cultures which functions as a motivation for learners

Quotes



P1 - With a mobile learning app such as Tandem I learnt a language, but in a transversal way I am also able to learn the different customs and traditions that I then make mine. For example, with a Moroccan girl, I was exchanging recipes: I was explaining her how to make Italian dishes and she was explaining me how to make Moroccan dishes. We were doing that using our 2 languages but at the same time were discovering culinary and cultural aspects of both of us and sharing it with each other. This is the main difference between a book and an app that connects you with people. And I find this such a priceless richness.

P5 - I would like a linguistic partners finding app that could be a window to other places and cultures. A way for me to look out that window and discover new cultural horizons.

P3 - Thanks to a Hispanic American linguistic buddy, I was able to improve my English and at the same time discovering a hidden face of America through his stories and anecdotes and the pictures he was sharing with me. It is a beautiful linguistic and cultural journey!

Recommendations

Building in the app a section for foreign travelers to post and publish in advance their booked journeys (specifying dates and city) in order for locals to meet a foreigner speaker of their second language and practice and for foreigners to get to know the local language and culture.

Introducing a feature that can enlighten public holidays in every country with enabled comment and tagging of pictures for learners to discover national and traditional celebrations.



Key finding 3

All the participants expressed the importance of having a safe environment with an efficient reporting feature



Quote

P2 - It happened very often that users asked me for my mobile phone number when I haven't really got to know them yet. I feel like my privacy is being invaded in this way from somebody I cannot trust yet.

P5 – [referring herself to Hello Talk] It is safer than social networks such as IG or FB. Because if you send a hot, inappropriate or sexual image or content, the user is automatically and immediately banned and eliminated by the app. This is the great advantage of this app

Recommendations

- Do not make the exact location of the user public in the app. City or province of residence is sufficient.
- Possibility of calling and video calling from the app in order to make oral communication possible within the app
- Reporting tool in order to offer a support to users that have a bad experience with another user is a fundamental service that need to be built in the app

Further findings



- It is possible to learn a language completely from oral interactions with real speakers found on mobile applications
- Filtering users especially based on linguistic goals is a priority for 5 participants out of 6
- The secret for the success of a language learning app based on partner learning is according to users in offering you the easiest way for users with common learning behaviors, common goals and common interests to find each others.
- 2 users used a nice metaphor of having the dream to find a linguistic WhatsApp in terms of communication features
- Speaking a language consolidate theoretical knowledge of a learner thanks to the active practice that it involves
- Users are not interested in reminders and insistent motivational tools as they believe that every time they use language exchange application the motivation comes from their goals and interest

What are our next steps?

- Validate findings by running a survey
- Run a design sprint for brainstorming



Affinity diagramming

