P4: Paper Prototyping

Abstract: After concluding interviews with prospective users in regards to language learning applications, we were able to pinpoint the target components that our application should have. However, we feel uncertain whether our platform is currently good 'as is'. Therefore, we created a mockup of our website by drawing how our ideal platform would look like into sheets of paper. We then performed paper prototyping by having three individuals perform tasks within our system, and obtaining their feedback as well as observing areas of weakness that we must address.

Briefing: Hello _____, we are working on a website that helps people learn a language. We'd like you to test a prototype of this website so that we understand what our users think and what it's like for them to use it. We would like to make it clear that this is not a test- we are only testing our prototype- please feel free to tell us if you find something difficult to use or navigate. We would love to hear what you think so please don't hesitate to be honest.
This session should take about 10 minutes. As you are working, please think out loud, this will help us with improving our design.
We would like your permission to record this session to help us improve our website. This recording will only be seen by our team and the people who grade this project.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Before you start using the website, we have a few questions for you. Have you ever learnt a new language before? If you have, have you ever used a mobile app or website to do so?

Roughly how many hours a week do you spend on your language studies?

Would you use just a website to learn a language or would you prefer to go to class and supplement classes with a website?

OK, we're done with questions now. We can start with our prototype. Please take your time with all the tasks.

What are your initial impressions of it?

Tasks:
1. In this task, you are going to make an account with our website. Please perform this task just as you would if you were online on our page. Additionally, please think out loud as you are performing this task. When you believe that you are finished with the task, say "Finished".
2. Set a study plan according to your preferences
3. In this next task, you will post a question on the community forum
4. Listening Comprehension
5. Word of the day

Observations:
Through paper prototyping, we were able to gain special insight on the strengths and weaknesses of our app. Although the first, third, fourth, and fifth tasks proved to be straightforward, we discovered some key issues specifically when it came to the second task, which involved having the user set their study preferences. In this task, our first user wished that she could have been given the option of choosing her own study duration as opposed to following a predetermined one set by the platform (which was 30 minutes, 1 hour, and 2 hours respectively). Our second user was observed to be struggling in locating the proper sections needed to accomplish this same task. It was mentioned that the text was not properly aligned, so it was kind of difficult to spot where a certain component was located. In regards to the overall interface of the app, our third user was observed to be having a little difficulty in figuring out the purpose of each element in the page since all he could see were the labels and icons, but wasn't so sure as to where the actual feature would lead him to or what to do in a certain task. Finally, one interesting thing that one of our users did was find if there was a feature on the platform that would translate the page into another language. We had not included such a feature, so the user seemed to be surprised about that.

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Resolutions:

From testing our prototype on potential users, we learned that using icons instead of text makes it much easier for a new user to navigate the website. We should attempt to replace more of the text in our existing prototype in future versions. We also found that users would like the freedom to choose their own study duration, instead of being restricted to the options presented. We could replace the current drop down list with a text-entry field, and let users choose their own study times. Further, to provide more information to first-time users, we could provide helpful suggestions when the user hovers over an element on the page. Finally, a feature to translate the website and exercises to another language could be implemented so as to take into consideration users that may not speak English.