

Domain Introduction

My domain is a language learning platform designed to enhance the user's learning experience and enable discovery of different learning styles through search of immersive activities. On this site, users can enroll in language courses, access media, and go to events, all of which are conducted in the language they wish to learn. Users may also practice their desired language via learning games and test their proficiency skills to understand their current level.

Domain Model (Appendix A)

I conducted 5 interviews to learn more about my domain of language learning: 3 of whom were either current, former, and prospective language learners, and 2 of whom were instructors. The learners detailed their experience taking online courses, private lessons and using mobile applications, in addition to how they went about searching for the right learning method. Lack of speaking confidence was a common denominator throughout all interviews in the student's inability to become fully fluent, and through the instructor interviews I gained the two additional insights that ended up shaping the immersion aspect of my website: the importance of gaining speaking confidence through live practice and learning through compelling storytelling. By attending themed linguistic events, users are set up to practice their speech with others, and through stories (consumed as media), users are more likely to absorb a new language. I therefore set out to create a site where users can not only search for their ideal course, they can also search for media and events that personally interest them. I followed the framework of concepts through meaningful relationships between subjects to objects, with predicates in between (Atherton and Hane, 2018). I wanted to center my "important entities" around how they relate directly to the language learner (main entity), and these important entities were concepts that were most resonant in my research. My domain has a variety of platforms with the same purpose of enabling language learning, so I reviewed several different information environments to compare against the content of my domain to ensure it contained the information necessary to explain its meaning.

Sitemap (Appendix B)

I chose to design my sitemap with rectangles, solid lines and dotted lines to easily draw the eye to the intended connection; and I chose colors that fade into lighter shades to clearly indicate hierarchy, and depth into the site. I originally had a 4 level hierarchy but decided to strip it back to a maximum of 3 (not counting the "Home" category), with a parent-sibling mapping framework (Lisa Maria Martin and Mcgrane, 2019). I was able to draw from most concepts in my domain model into more detail onto my sitemap, with less direct use of the entity "learning goals" motivated by the various example entities (work, travel, self improvement, family and friends) as originally intended. The learner's motivations are typically addressed just as the user is signing up for a language platform through an intake form, which I chose not represent on the sitemap, but I found a place for these entities by incorporating them into the "Practice" page, where users can review specific vocabulary related to their motivations, such as business or travel, for example. There was a point where I felt my sitemap was too large and needed to be condensed from its more administrative headers "Help", "Contact", "About Us". I conducted a card sort with 10 users, which helped me determine that the subpages "FAQs" and "Forum" could fall under "Resources" (previously named "Guides") and any contact information could easily be found under "About Us", thus allowing me to prevent information clutter and reduce the sitemap size. Because some users placed these cards under their own category "Info", I decided to rename the "Guides" to "Resources", ensuring to still encompass the informational guides I have originally placed there. I also conducted a couple of tree tests to validate sitemap design choices, and one of my bigger findings was the need to move "saved media", "booked events", and "enrolled classes" from "My Profile" to its more obviously labeled global navigation headers (Media, Events, Learn), due to only 35% of respondents answering correctly to where they were located. Because my intention was to have the user have one central location to track the main site activities, I decided to follow the polyhierarchical classification scheme, which allows for items to appear in several places in the taxonomy, still keeping them under "My Profile" as well (Spencer, 2010). I wanted to ensure users had the option to browse through media content, courses and events in the global search bar and also refine their searches through faceted navigation (Spencer, 2010). These filters were heavily informed by my interviews, where interviewees described what was important to them when searching for a learning course. For media and events, I drew upon comparisons of similar information environments, such as Lingopie and Meetup to help guide my filters, keeping the focus of attaining linguistic practice in mind. For the "Watch" Media, I wanted the user to have the option to decide the length of the video upfront, to account for time constraints that so many learners face when tasking themselves with learning a language for the day, as was discovered in my interviews.

User flow (Appendix C)

I used a "Goal" to title the user flow and communicate the desired outcome of the journey, which was to enroll in a group course for beginners (Caddick and Cable, 2011). I chose to use single blocks to represent pages, diamonds to represent decision points, and ovals to represent user actions, with start and end steps clearly labeled and colored differently from the main flow content. There are one way arrows communicating the direction of the flow along with some text in those after the decision diamonds, to describe the different potential outcomes. I felt it was important to also add user thoughts to highlight user emotions and create a narrative (Gibbons, 2018). I chose to highlight this particular journey as it is one of the main features of my website and a major pain point I discovered during my user research - where users had trouble finding a course that was exactly right for them. I was inspired by one of my user interviews where she described her struggle with finding the right kind of learning course to fit her needs and not knowing where to look, nor ever having the right kind of information to base her decision on. I wanted to create a flow that addressed these needs and pain points, including the facets outlined in my sitemap for further clarification on the user's options (Spencer, 2010). My card sort revealed that users tended to group the proficiency test with courses, which validated my decision to move it from under "Learn" instead of "Resources". Incorporating this, I mention in the first user thought that within the "Learn" page, the user sees the option to check their proficiency level, in case they need to be sure before signing up for a particular course. In this user's case, they already know they are a complete beginner; so for the sake of communicating concisely and effectively, the decision flow to opt in or out of testing their proficiency was not explicitly outlined.

Wireframes (Appendix D)

When sketching my wireframes, I began with paper sketches for quick iteration and to get a general sense of how I wanted my layout to appear, time boxing myself and starting with the top horizontal global navigation scheme (Experience, 2021). Once I got a sense of the layout, I then moved onto using Balsamiq to draft low to mid fidelity wireframes. I chose to focus on the profile page and two of the main purposes of my immersive language learning site, where users can search for a course to enroll in and an event to book to practice their speaking skills. All pages contain the same header section, which is a layout of the banner and global navigation bar and beneath it, the breadcrumbs so the user can easily trace their navigation. Through evaluation of similar information environments and user interviews, I further realized the city and language should not be buried under the profile or displayed in the filters for its main features, because where the user lives and what language they wish to learn are typically fixed; though the design does still allow the user to switch cities and language easily should they choose to.

WIREFRAME 1: Browse Group Courses (D1)

The purpose of this page is for users to browse through group courses in their pre-selected language within their pre-selected city. As users select filters, they also appear at the top of the page “filter pills” for another visual reference, otherwise they would need to scroll through the page if they wanted to deselect their filters or remember which were selected (NB UX, 2022). I added the proficiency filter at the top, following the principle of filter prioritization of high level filters at the top and more specific ones at the bottom, such as the course length (Experience, 2018). Near the proficiency level filter, I added a contextual link enabling the user to test their proficiency level (also nestled under “Learn”) in case they weren’t sure prior to searching for a course (Ch 7, Rosenfeld, Morville and Arango, 2015). To prevent pogo-sticking, I made sure there was a strong enough information scent displayed on the course results so the user felt confident in clicking through to see more details on the course (Experience, 2015). This is evidenced through displaying review summaries, for example, with the option to click directly to them through the reviews link or to see them after they click “See Details”.

WIREFRAME 2: See Course Details (D2)

The expected user behavior is for users to seek more information before deciding to enroll in the course or not, by reading not only the course details, but other student reviews and suggested blog posts which are also nestled under the “Resources” tab, to further guide their decision. Underneath the reviews is an option to take the site’s language proficiency test, in large clear text in case the user is unsure of their level before enrolling. This link is also available in WIREFRAME 1, near the language proficiency filter. Following the Nielson and Norman Group’s advice on redundancy, I found it appropriate to add it in again on this page for another opportunity of findability in case the user missed it or disregarded it on the previous page. Still following this principle, I had thought of repeating the “Enroll Now” button at the bottom of the page, but ultimately decided not to, as “duplicating links is usually not necessary if your pages are 2-3 screens long”, in which case this is only one (Loranger, 2016). For demonstration purposes only, I used OpenAI ChatGPT (2024) to generate the generic instructor bio and fake user review.

WIREFRAME 3: My Profile (D3)

The purpose of this wireframe is to show a summary of the site’s main features. I wanted to provide a snapshot of the user’s main activities by nestling it under the Profile page (in addition to its relevant global navigation headers as previously mentioned) with redundant navigation (Loranger, 2016). Since this page is long and not obvious from the top which content is going to be displayed at first glance, I added a local navigation bar at the top so the user can quickly “explore the immediate area” (Ch.8, Rosenfeld, Morville and Arango, 2015). Showing clear hierarchy with headers and dividers, the user can clearly visualize content.

WIREFRAME 4: Event Selection (D4)

Here, the user can see more details about their event selection, including location (with an interactive map and contextual link describing how to arrive there), time, description and contact information. Beneath the event they have the option to see reviews and other suggested events based on their previous selections, and beneath that, they are offered an opportunity to practice their Portuguese (language example used in wireframe), taking them to the “Practice” section of the website. For demonstration purposes only, I used OpenAI ChatGPT (2024) to generate a fake user review.

Wireframe Evaluation:

To conduct my wireframe evaluations, I did a moderated study with a mix of experienced and inexperienced users with language learning sites. I asked what they believed the purpose of each page was, set open-ended information seeking tasks, and followed up with questions on whether any information was confusing and which were most intuitive (Nielsen Norman Group, 2015). In my evaluation of Wireframe 1, I asked how the user might enroll in a course. I had mixed reactions to the call to action, where the user would select “See Details” to proceed to WIREFRAME 2. Initially, I had “Enroll Now”, with the next page following the same labeling convention with “Enroll Now” on the header and included in the breadcrumbs. One participant noted they would be hesitant to click as it would force them to make a payment right away, so I then updated it to “See Details” to reflect the page’s purpose which is to display more information to help the user make a better informed decision. Once I made the update, another participant noted that “See Details” was not a direct enough call to action for pointing the user to achieve the website’s business goal. I ultimately decided to keep “See Details”, as I wanted to focus on the user for information seeking and not on the site’s business goal. In another evaluation, the participant noted that the course results had redundant informational icons, where the “location” and “online” icons had the same purpose as the additional “in person” and “online” icons embedded in smaller text on the upper left side of the course selection box (now removed). My intention was to highlight the “Course Format” filter selection, but the “Location” filter icon was clear enough for the user to understand whether it was online or not. Leaning on Spencer’s design principle to maintain design balance and avoid clutter, I removed these icons (Ch 22, Spencer, 2010). Another user said she would have liked to see a link to the instructor profile, and I realized that within my sitemap I had already included a page to learn more about the course instructors in “About Us” - so I added a contextual navigation link to allow the user to access that page and see more about that particular instructor. In the future, I would consider adding a larger visual banner for the language selection.

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Websites Reviewed

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|---------------------|--|
| Lingopie | www.lingopie.com |
| Let's Learn Spanish | www.letslearnspanish.co.uk |
| Meetup | www.meetup.com |

Link to OneDrive containing consent forms and recordings: [INM401_RafaelaRossi](#)