

The LanGuide Project as a Community of Practice

Neva Čebtron

University of Primorska, Slovenia

neva.cebron@fhs.upr.si

The Design of the LanGuide Project

The LanGuide project ran from September 2019 until August 2022 and was funded under Erasmus+ KA2 – Strategic Partnerships programme of the European Commission. LanGuide stands for ‘Language Guidance Tool for Improving Language Knowledge’ and was an initiative of a European consortium of 6 higher education institutions from 5 European countries: Univerza na Primorskem – Università del Litorale in Slovenia, Sveučilište u Rijeci and Sveučilište u Zadru in Croatia, Universitatea Transilvania din Braşov in Romania, Universidad de Castilla – La Mancha in Spain and Maelardalens Högskola in Sweden.

The primary goal of the LanGuide project was to set up the LanGuide Mobile App, which offers the stakeholders an opportunity to enhance their language knowledge of English, Croatian, Italian, Romanian, Slovenian and Spanish by just tapping on the mobile phone, without any charges, at any time and everywhere. Students, academic and administrative staff, the main target audience of the endeavour, are now able to choose among a range of specialist language domains (academic, secretarial, mobility and IT language) at various proficiency levels (basic, intermediate and advanced), in order to practice their language skills in a self-study mode.

The main objectives of LanGuide Mobile App are:

- to offer stakeholders within the academia and to a larger public a language learning tool at their fingertips,
- to provide a set of exercises in a chosen foreign language that can enhance their communicative skills by focusing on common communicative situations within the academic settings,
- to enable stakeholders easy access to language practice wherever they are and whenever they may wish to spend a little time to improve their language skills.

The registered users of the LanGuide Mobile App can easily move between languages, modules and levels of learning materials. They can take advantage of a large number of exercises at three levels for the English language, as well as of a compelling range of exercises for Croatian, Italian, Romanian, Slovenian and Spanish at the basic or intermediate level.

The LanGuide Community of Practice

The Languide partners formed a Community of Practice (COP) as posited by Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002, p. 4), namely, as ‘a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.’ Having a common domain of interest, the partners in the LanGuide project were able to combine their different competences and learn from each other through discussion, team work and cooperation so as to accomplish their common goal: the LanGuide Mobile App for Language Learning.

The LanGuide COP consisted, on the one hand, of the coordinating institution, the Faculty of Humanities (UP FHS) at the University of Primorska (UP) in Slovenia, who were also involved in the LanGuide team of language teaching practitioners and researchers, along with linguists from the partner institutions from various universities: the Faculty of Informatics and Digital Technologies (FIDIT) at the University of Rijeka (UNIRI) in Croatia, the Departments of Anglistics at the University of Zadar (UNIZD) in Croatia, the Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics (DELTA) from the Faculty of Letters at the Transilvania University of Braşov (UTDB) in Romania, and the University of Castilla-La Mancha (UCLM) in Spain. The interactive software tool, on the other hand, was devised by the LanGuide IT team of partners from three universities, i.e., the University of Castilla-La Mancha (UCLM) in Spain, the School of Innovation, Design and Engineering (IDT) at Mälardalen University (MDU) in Sweden, and the Faculty of Informatics and Digital Technologies (FIDIT) at the University of Rijeka (UNIRI) in Croatia.

Through consultations and discussions, as well as virtually, taking advantage of the new technologies, the two teams were able to share insights and experience, so as to develop a common repertoire of resources, the LanGuide Mobile App.

Work on the LanGuide project was deeply marked by the Covid-19 pandemic throughout its various stages, making it impossible to meet in person during the crucial phases of the project, while also proving that ‘it is

possible to communicate and interact productively via the Internet, the Zoom, the Google Drive and other virtual resources, beyond the geographical boundaries of traditional communities' (Beaven, 2009, p. 79).

The LanGuide Monograph

One of the aims of the LanGuide project is to share not just the LanGuide Mobile App as a tool, but also the background thinking, considerations and research that the partners in the project undertook as a community of practice in order to deliver the envisaged results.

Thus, in this monograph, the partners describe their research, planning and stages of production of the LanGuide Mobile App. The papers in this book are meant for researchers of the mobile language learning, language-teaching practitioners or software developers as well as for those aiming to use the LanGuide Mobile App for self-guided study of the languages of the partnership or English. Together, the articles form a collection of new and relevant insights into interdisciplinary collaboration required to merge approaches to foreign language teaching and learning with new software developing pursuits.

The contents of the monograph are, however, divided into three parts; the first part focuses on background theoretical perspectives and how these can be translated into teaching methodology, while the second part gives practical examples of the implementation of various activities at different stages of the LanGuide project into the final result, i.e., the LanGuide App. Multilingualism and multiculturalism are two core values promoted throughout all the activities of the LanGuide partnership. In keeping with these core principles, the third part of the monograph offers readers the opportunity to engage with the contents of the monograph in all the languages of the partnership. Thus, the third part of the monograph consists of lengthier summaries of all the papers in Croatian, Romanian, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish.

Part 1: Research Articles

There are three papers in the first part: 'Background to LanGuide Language-Learning Framework' by Neva Čebren and Emma Beatriz Villegas Cunjá, 'What Kind of LSP Does LanGuide Propose?' by Andreea Nechifor and Cristina Dimulescu, and 'Mobile Learning of Language for Specific Purposes: From Course Design to User Testing' by Lucia Načinović Prskalo, Vanja Slavuj, and Marija Brkić Bakarić.

In the paper 'Background to LanGuide Language-Learning Framework'

the authors first focus on the novelties introduced to foreign language learning by Mobile Assisted Language Learning and mobile learning. By giving an overview of recently published research into unique affordances of mobile technologies the article analyses the implications these novel approaches have for a new language learning methodology. Moreover, the authors discuss the general framework for foreign language learning materials adapted to mobile devices, while also providing a description of the possible structure of the language for specific purposes (hereafter LSP) modules for language for academic purposes, secretarial or administrative purposes, mobility and IT language needs. The practical implications of developing a range of language modules are also reviewed, highlighting the fact that the LanGuide App could only be considered a direct result of intertwining expertise of foreign language teachers and researchers with IT developers and researchers. The conclusions of the paper lead to re-evaluation of some teaching approaches and suggest recommendations for teaching practitioners and materials developers engaging in mobile learning.

In the second study, entitled ‘What Kind of LSP Does LanGuide Propose?’, the authors Andreea Nechifor and Cristina Dimulescu examine possibilities of intertwining LSP teaching approaches with intercultural issues in the mobile learning mode. They discuss the linguistic technicalities involved in developing a mobile application, along with the aspect of culture, which can be included in such exercises. A very special approach to integrating the cultural element in the language tasks designed for the mobile applications is proposed. The resulting teaching materials are in perfect accordance with the literature on Computer/Mobile-Assisted Language Learning, intercultural pedagogy and harmonized with LSP principles. Thus, the authors have managed to enhance in their study a number of novel perspectives, which distinguish the results of the LanGuide project from other language learning mobile applications, making it a teaching resource for foreign language learning par excellence, a worthy contribution to language teaching in the digital era.

Like the contribution by Andreea Nechifor and Cristina Dimulescu, the chapter ‘Mobile Learning of Language for Specific Purposes: From Course Design to User Testing’ by Lucia Načinović Prskalo, Vanja Slavuj, Marija Brkić Bakarić deals with principles of integrating teaching LSP with learning on a mobile device. However, they first focus on describing a general approach to developing an LSP course for the mobile context and then present the web and mobile applications developed for the purpose of the

LanGuide project. In the third section, the paper deals with the evaluation of the LanGuide mobile app at UNIRI through unmoderated remote usability testing conducted over a period of one month. The responses to the testing were compiled in an extensive anonymous questionnaire, addressing users' experience with the LanGuide mobile app, specifics of the learning approach, and language-specific user experience. The results of the testing were compiled and analysed, while the conclusions are reported in this paper.

Part 2: Practical Examples

In the monograph, there are also four chapters with the practical examples of activities carried out within the LanGuide project. Two papers deal with compiling and assessing teaching and learning activities, namely, 'Retrieval and Use of Erasmus+-based Documents in Preparing LanGuide Academic Mobility Exercises' by Ivo Fabijanić and 'What Can We Improve: Suggestions for Upgrading the Language App for Slovenian Language' by Nika Pavletić, Klara Šumenjak and Jana Volk. Another two papers tackle the issues of software design and development, namely, 'LanGuide Content Manager: Web-Based Platform to Support LSP Learning Content,' a contribution by María Dolores Lozano, Enrique Arias, and Pablo Bermejo, and 'Mobile Application as a Learning Tool' by Afshin Ameri, Philip Lindstedt, and Radu Dobrin.

In his contribution to the LanGuide monograph, entitled 'Retrieval and Use of Erasmus+-based Documents in Preparing LanGuide Academic Mobility Exercises,' Ivo Fabijanić presents the stages of preparation of the exercises for the Mobility Module. Since the exercises are meant for three groups of specific users (administrative staff, university teachers and students), a considerable corpus of texts from the web pages of the European Commission, dealing with various aspects of academic mobility, were first compiled and sorted according to their topics. At the second stage, the texts were classified according to the basic and transversal skills they could enhance, while also improving knowledge of specific mobility terminology, expressions and phrasemes, thus promoting better quality of socioeducational, cultural, intercultural and communicational capability of individual users.

'What Can We Improve: Suggestions for Upgrading the Language App for Slovenian Language' Nika Pavletić, Klara Šumenjak and Jana Volk presented the development of the Slovenian Module from its inception. The central part of the article thoroughly examines the Slovenian language

exercises designed for the LanGuide project: the three levels of exercises, their types, and the skills learners gain by doing them. Unlike other Slovenian language apps, the LanGuide App offers its users vocabulary and grammar exercises for mobility, academic, IT, and administrative purposes. However, the authors also give a critical evaluation of what can be expected from this new resource, giving an honest account of the technical and content-related advantages and shortcomings of the LanGuide App, as well as offering guidelines for further work and development of language guidance apps in general.

The team from UCLM in Spain, María Dolores Lozano, Enrique Arias and Pablo Bermejo in their article entitled ‘LanGuide Content Manager: Web-Based Platform to Support LSP Learning Content’ focused on the design and development of the LanGuide Content Management System. This is a Web-based application, which seeks to help linguists who decide to create language-learning exercises in different languages, but also deal with various specialist domains and a range of language competence levels. Therefore, the software application offers a wide variety of different types of exercises in accordance with the specifications envisaged in the common methodology and the exercise template defined in the LanGuide project. The tool allows management of both authors and exercises with different filters to ease searches, but also includes a preview function, which allows linguists to check the exercise created prior to its publication. The paper also reports on a small-scale testing of the Content Manager among the authors of the exercises included in the LanGuide App.

The last contribution in the monograph, ‘Mobile Application as a Learning Tool’ was written by the Swedish team from MDU, Afshin Ameri, Radu Dobrin, Philip Rautell Lindstedt. The paper discusses the final result of the LanGuide project, i.e., the mobile application as it is presented to the stakeholders. The tools and technologies used in the development are also presented and the path forward for the possible development and improvements of the LanGuide App are explored. Since accessibility and ease of interaction with mobile devices have greatly increased in the past few years, access to different online materials and resources has made them a considerably useful tool for education. In view of the fact that mobile devices nowadays contain the processing power of a small computer the set of exercises on the LanGuide App can in future be expanded by the present community of practice and new experts who may wish to join and contribute to the project, because the software developed so far can accommodate many new initiatives.

Conclusions

The articles in this monograph are thus meant for teachers, IT developers, researchers and other practitioners interested in enhancing their professional work by devising mobile learning activities for language learning in general. It was a challenge and a privilege to be able to participate to the LanGuide project and to share the insights gained from its various pursuits with a wider audience. Therefore, this book is meant as a contribution to expanding the professional discourse regarding the place and role of mobile learning of foreign languages within education to new pedagogical insights, new IT developers' designs and new interdisciplinary approaches.

References

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