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Methodological features of mobile applications for studying foreign languages created in Russia on the example of «Words – Учи иностранные языки»

This article conducts an analysis of methodological features of mobile applications for foreign language acquisition developed in Russia, specifically examining «Words – Учи иностранные языки», in comparison with the foreign applications «Quizlet» and «AnkiDroid». The study evaluates the functionality, pedagogical strengths, and limitations of each application, highlighting their unique features and particularities as tools for enhancing level of language knowledge.

Key words: language learning; mobile language learning applications; vocabulary acquisition; flashcards; self-study.

Nowadays, most people cannot imagine their lives without mobile phones. A small gadget plays many roles, besides being a means of communication, it can be an alarm clock, a camera, a wallet, a planner and so on. That is why, different applications, which can fulfill everyone's needs, are in great demand today. Among such applications there are programmes [2] created for studying foreign languages [1]. They are quite popular, as it does not require much effort to open an application from time to time and revise the words or do some short daily tasks. A lot of people doing research in this sphere agree that the features of mobile applications such as interactivity, ubiquity and

portability make them a precious tool for improving one's knowledge of the target language [4]. The aim of this article is to analyze one of the mobile applications created in Russia and to compare it with a foreign programme with similar functions. The name of the Russian application is «Words – Учи иностранные языки». It was created by Andrey Lebedev in 2014. The primary goal of this application is to help users learn new words and expand their vocabulary. Therefore, two similar foreign vocabulary training programmes were selected for analysis. First one is called «Quizlet» and it was created a year earlier than the Russian analogue – in 2013. And the second one is called «AnkiDroid», first launched in 2006. This article will address the following aspects: the functionality of both programmes, their advantages and disadvantages from the perspective of English language learners, and the potential for Russian applications aimed at enhancing English language skills. «Words – Учи иностранные языки» [6] is represented as a collection of cards compiled according to the topic or the grammar rule. The user can open the collection to learn all the words, while doing this, he or she can look at the picture, see the word, its transcription and the translation. In addition, a pronunciation of the word is available if the user clicks the sound button in the bottom corner of the card. After learning all the words from the collection, the user can do any of the following tasks: look through the training cards (see the Russian word first and after clicking listen to the pronunciation and the translation of the word into English), make the word from letters (a user can see a picture or listen to the pronunciation as a hint), choose a correct translation of the word, listen to the pronunciation and select the correct word or form it from the letters, locate the translation of the word in the grid of letters (word search puzzle), find the pairs of words, take a true-false test, play a memory game (finding the pairs of words in restricted time).

Each user can create their own set of cards, and once the collection reaches 10 or more cards, all previously listed tasks become available and are generated automatically. The app has a feature of recognizing words from a loaded picture and these words can be added to the user's set of cards too. Some ready-made collections are also available to people but not all of them are free of charge. The user can also look through the recent cards and add to his or her collection. The tab called «achievements» provides the user with some statistics – the level of the user, the information about how many words have been learned through the day/week/month, how much time was spent on training et cetera. On the tab «Words» there is a feed of possible words to add to lessons for learning that can be adjusted by level of difficulty and sorted randomly, in alphabetical order or by frequency of occurrence. The words in feed are provided with transcription, translation in various parts of speech, their frequency of usage is also given, for example «top 7000». In the app a user can turn on notifications to learn the words and the word of the day.

The foreign application called «Quizlet» [5] is also designed in the form of a collection of cards that can be organized in folders and modules. A user can create his or her own collection of cards, moreover, it is possible to add the pictures from the application's gallery. Also, it is possible to find and add a large number of other users' collections on most topics, not only on language related issues. The following activities are possible with the collection: drilling activities during which a person is shown the cards several times until the correct answers are chosen, matching the words with their translations (a timer is on during the game, so you can see the best result and break a record), taking a quiz, including True/False questions, Multiple Choice questions, Short answer questions and Matching tasks.

Another foreign application to compare with is «AnkiDroid» [3]. It uses a more advanced flashcards methodology. Users can create their own decks containing flashcards or import them from a large free database of other users' shared decks. The cards in the deck are divided into three groups: new cards, learning cards and cards to review. At first, all of them are located in a new cards section. When the user sees a new card's front side, he or she should try to remember its back side and check the answer after that. Then, the user chooses one of the following options: «Again» – if the user doesn't know the answer, the card will be shown again in less than a minute and put in the learning section; «Hard» – if the user can hardly remember the right answer, the card will be shown in less than 6 minutes and put in the learning section; «Good» – if the user knows the answer but is not quite sure yet and the card will be shown in less than 10 minutes and put in the learning section; «Easy» – if the user knows the answer very well and the card will be shown in three days and put in the review section.

So, it turns out that every card in the deck is repeatedly shown to the user many times until becoming actually well-remembered. AnkiDroid also provides many powerful tools for memorizing not only words and phrases but everything that can be studied. The user can create different types of cards: cloze cards (words are omitted from a text), cards with input, reversed cards, cards with image occlusion. It is possible to create cards just by pasting images on its both sides. Use of tags is also included. The decks can be grouped in topics and can have subdecks allowing people to organize the structure of cards. The common things between these applications is the approach to learning the words with the help of the flashcards and their organization. However, the Russian application is oriented more on self-studying specifically languages while Quizlet is designed primarily for teachers and AnkiDroid is more universal for memorizing any kind of knowledge. «Words – Учи иностранные языки» has a wider variety of tasks that can be generated within each word collection. Users are given push notifications at regular intervals to make them open the application and revise the material. It is possible to «level up» your account receiving points for doing tasks.

Quizlet has less varied tasks but it is possible to share your collections and start interactive games where other people can join via QR-code and compete with each other. AnkiDroid has a more advanced memorization approach and more powerful tools for it. Both foreign programmes are more time-consuming in creating flashcards than the Russian one. The obvious advantage of these programmes is that they can be easily installed on any mobile device, they do not require Internet connection for practice tasks. Drilling does not require much time and is usually done in an easy and light manner. As for the disadvantages, one can mention the fact that adding a new collection and filling it with words is a bit time-consuming. Moreover, certain tasks, such as forming words from letters or recalling the translation of a word from memory, can be debated regarding their methodological effectiveness.

Overall, it can be said that learning words or phrases with cards is quite useful for the early stages of learning any language but further its effectiveness decreases as a context becomes more important in memorization because words often have multiple meanings and various shades of meaning depending on the situation.

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