DELIVERABLE REPORT D8.3.3

"Social Learning of Language for Immigrants"

collaborative project

MASELTOV

Mobile Assistance for Social Inclusion and Empowerment of Immigrants with Persuasive Learning Technologies and Social Network Services

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1. EXECTUVE SUMMARY

This deliverable D8.3.3 describes the work carried out in the scope of Task 8.3 "Social Learning of Language for Immigrants" of Work Package 8 "COMMUNITY BUILDING SERVICES". The opportunity to use social connectedness through the MASELTOV services to enhance language learning will bring important benefits to MASELTOV users in terms of both community building and language learning. That is, there is an opportunity to build a 'community of practice'.

The replacement partner (PP) faces some limitations on this task but, building on the recommendations made in deliverable D7.5.1 regarding social / informal learning, PP has created the opportunity for social learning through three main tools: the MASELTOV discussion forum, Facebook and elements of the language lessons developed in Task 7.5. It is believed that these implementations satisfy the objectives of the Task, despite the problems faced. The trials to be held in Graz and London in autumn 2014 will inform on these ideas.

2. INTRODUCTION

This deliverable fully describes the aims and the implementation in the MASELTOV project for using social networks to motivate and support language learning. It builds on the approach and principles outlined in the previous deliverable D8.3.2 and provides more precise detail about the implementation for the final user trials scheduled for autumn 2014.

The MASELTOV Description of Work outlines this Task as follows:

"Learning in social networks is based on the motivation to exchange information of interest, by enabling a "win-win" situation. This happens e.g. in language learning if partners are engaged in learning the other's mother language and they help each other by exchanging knowledge. Other modes of learning are treated as well, such as, learning of communication (cultural differences), about health care, administrative skills – all based on the principle of "exchange of interest" – e.g., an immigrant asking for local information might provide a native the opportunity to get insight into his culture's background – thus implementing "Babylon's bazaar" for everything. The motivation behind is to mobilise not only immigrants to move into communication with local citizen but also to motivate the native citizen to contact and try to understand the immigrant as a representative of a foreign culture with interesting messages for anyone."

3. BACKGROUND TO THE DELIVERABLE

Language learning is not just an individual process of acquisition, practice and improvement but a social process of enculturation, and relationship forming. Cultural and linguistic exchanges between learners and teachers, or between learners, other learners and the wider community constitutes 'social' learning of language. Social learning is increasingly fostered through the use of the internet and often mobile-based services. According to two important aims of MASELTOV – community building and language learning – immigrants should have the means to easily interact with their peers, and also with members of the community who are already more fully integrated into the host country. It is through these means that mutual peer support is encouraged, and also the exchange of information, cultural knowledge and language skills with more experienced mambers of the community.

It is noted in this deliverable that this task is being implemented after the withdrawal of the original task lead, busuu.com. The objectives of this work package were originally devised with busuu.com's well-established social network of language learners in mind. Without the technology, user base and commercial interest in this kind of tool, the new partner, Pearson Publishing Ltd (PP) is less well placed to develop and deliver complex tools specific to language learning in social networks. Some emphasis has therefore been shifted from this particular task to the delivery of mobile-situated language learning materials. However, the project's objective to stimulate language learning in social networks is taken seriously and

achieved through the implementation and integration of several simple elegant tools, which are described in this report.

Other related deliverables prior to this one (D8.3.1 Social Learning of Language for Migrants; D7.5.1 Mobile Assisted Language Learning) have explored in detail the recent literature on social and informal learning and the role that social networks can play in improving learners confidence and fostering a sense of community. The obvious advantage for learning is that, with the right ingredients, social network tools are able to create a 'community of practice'[1] where users can interact to provide each other with help, feedback and motivation. Deliverable D8.3.2 set out which tools will enable this kind of community to be established. These were:

- The MASELTOV discussion forum (implemented in Task 8.1)
- The use of a dedicated Facebook group for participants
- The design of language lessons (Task 7.5) which will include prompts and activities for social learning

In deliverable D7.5.1, the authors developed ideas for social / informal learning in MASELTOV without the use of the busuu.com social network. It will be important to describe how all of these recommendations are met in the final implementation.

4. TOOLS AND FEATURES

4.1 THE DISCUSSION FORUM

The MASELTOV service includes a mobile discussion forum to encourage MASELTOV users to communicate with each other publically but informally. It is structured around public topics, threads and comments. Deliverable D7.5.2 has already identified this kind of 'community-centred' network as very suitable for supporting language learning and deliverable D8.3.2 cited the example of www.saysomethingin.com/welsh – which has a very active forum of motivated Welsh learners who interact with each other and support each other's learning – as a desirable model to follow.

4.1.1 FORUM TOPICS

With a suitable tool to achieve this already in place, what remains is to stimulate its use for language learning activity among the MASELTOV users. While the tool holds much potential on its own, for it to be beneficial in practical terms enough users must be using it for the intended purpose. The more people that engage with the forum to seek or offer feedback or advice, the more beneficial it becomes and the more likely other users are to also engage.

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[1] Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Areas have therefore been signposted in the forum as specific areas for language discussion. For example, a 'topic' exists in the forum called *"Learn English!"* for London users, and *"Deutsch lernen!"* for users in Graz. Each topic is given a structure similar to the below.

Table 1: Description of prepopulated forum threads for language learning

Thread	Purpose	Description for users
Chat	Invite users to introduce themselves to other learners in the community.	*"Welcome! Introduce yourself to other MASELTOV members and see who else is in your situation. Tell us about you. Can you do it in English/German?"*
Connections	Allow users to post to say that they are looking for a language partner for messaging or support.	*"Can someone help you? Are you looking for someone to chat with and practice your language? Let people know here. See who else is looking too!"*
Corrections	Create an area where users can post pieces of writing and receive feedback from other users and advanced speakers. Pieces of writing may be prompted by activities in the language lessons.	*"The MASELTOV community can help with your language. If you want feedback on any writing that you do, post it here and someone can help you correct it.* *If you've done any activities from the language lessons, show us here! Don't be shy!"*
Life in the UK / Austria	An introductory post to stimulate a lively discussion in the target language.	*"Share your impressions of Life in the UK/Austria – in English/German, of course!* *What are the three things that you like most about the UK/Austria? What are the three strangest?* *Do you agree with other members of the community?"*

Users are also able to create their own threads with questions or discussion points so the forum topic has the potential to expand with usage and be shaped into whatever suits the needs and preferences of the community.
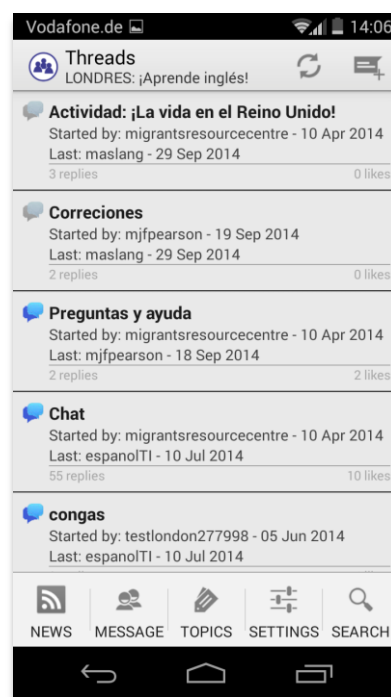
Figure 1: List of topics in the forum

Figure 2: Language learning threads within the 'Learn English' topic

4.1.2 THE ROLE OF FACILITATORS

It is well anticipated that learners' attraction to the forum will be contingent on the presence of advanced users of the language who can provide advice and feedback. Indeed, deliverable D7.5.1 clearly identifies the absence of feedback on their contributions as a significant discouragement to participation (MASELTOV D7.5.1 p27). It will also be necessary, particularly in the early stages, for these advanced users instigate active posting in the forum in order to encourage participation. It is therefore important that facilitators are involved during the project trials to:

- Respond to users' contributions with answers to questions and corrections to language when requested.
- Participate in discussions and offer helpful insights into issues of concern to users.
- Make regular posts of interesting links/resources/tips to attract users.
- Offer to connect with users outside the forum for messaging/chat in the target language.

Facilitators are native speakers of the language of the target group who are also fluent speakers of the host language. They are recruited by participating NGOs (i.e. MRC, DAN). They will be employed during the field trials to provide essential support in a number of

capacities, including supporting social engagement through the forum and Facebook as described above. PP will also participate actively in both of these media for the duration of the field trials in instances where English is the target language.

4.1.3   THE ROLE OF THE LANGUAGE LESSONS

The language lessons (see Task 7.5) have been designed to include prompts to complete activities and post short pieces of writing, links or ideas in the forum. Pieces of writing (e.g. *"Imagine you are late for work because something went wrong with transport. Write a text message to your boss saying sorry and explaining what happened"*) might be posted directly into the 'Corrections' thread in the language topic for the appropriate location, and subsequently receive feedback from facilitators and other users. The forum and the language learning app are integrated in such a way that users can follow links that directly and conveniently open the forum from the language lesson (see below, Section 4.3).

4.2   FACEBOOK

Facebook is used as an additional vehicle for encouraging social interaction for language learning. Many of the trial's participants will also be active users of Facebook and prefer to interact with a tool they are familiar with. Facebook offers an array of features including making personal connections, sharing ideas and media, arranging events and holding forum discussions. Facebook allows for the creation of either public or private groups, where, as members, users can share and communicate with other members and receive notifications when there is activity on the group's page. A Facebook group has been created for each of the trial locations with the purpose of connecting and engaging learners of the target languages. The group for English learners can be found at:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/687362688000641/

Similar to the forum, it is essential that these groups include the involvement of facilitators who can regularly post interesting, helpful and relevant material to attract users. Activity on the groups' pages consists of posting links to language apps and resources, posting a 'word of the day', and notifying users of any events in the area that might be of interest. Facilitators also respond to posts made by users. In turn, users are encouraged by the groups' description, and also by the language lessons, to use the group for open discussion with other members about learning the target language.

The language lessons incorporate frequent links to the groups' Facebook pages as an incitement to participate. The links directly open the group page in the Facebook for Android application, which the user can install.
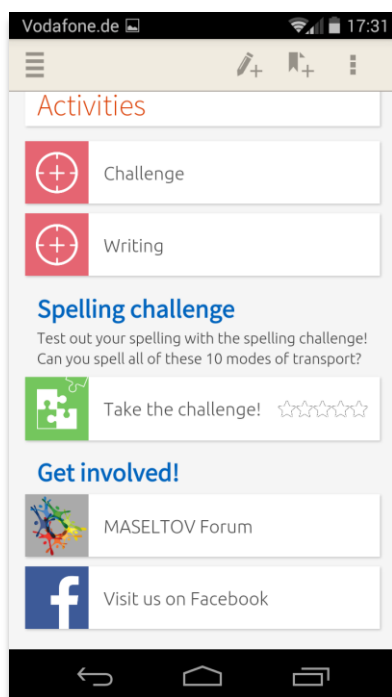
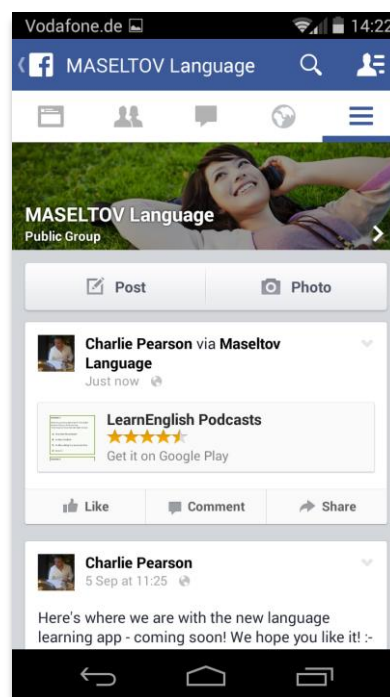**Figure 3: A page of the language lessons showing links to Facebook and the forum**

Figure 4: Facebook group page viewed on Android

4.3 THE LANGUAGE LESSONS

4.3.1 PRINCIPLES

The research carried out for deliverable D7.5.1 found that the literature was clear of the need to set up learning tasks for exchanges/discussion to happen with the intended purpose (MASELTOV D7.5.1 p27). That is why prompts and tasks within the language lessons play an important role. As described in deliverable D7.5.2, the language lessons that are available through the MASELTOV language learning application include prompts to use the language socially. Most lessons contain 'Challenges' which have three purposes:

1. To prompt the user to use the language in the real world (i.e. to go out and use the target language in an everyday situation).
2. To write something in the target language and share it in the forum or on Facebook.
3. To share information about the topics in the language learning lesson for the benefit of other users.

4.3.2 IMPLEMENTATION

For example, a lesson covering 'Looking for Work' might challenge the learner to use the internet in the target language to find out about job opportunities and then share them with

other learners via the MASELTOV forum or Facebook. Writing challenges (eg. *"Tell us about the worst injury you ever had."*) are always followed by an invitation to share written work in the MASELTOV forum for feedback from peers and or facilitators.
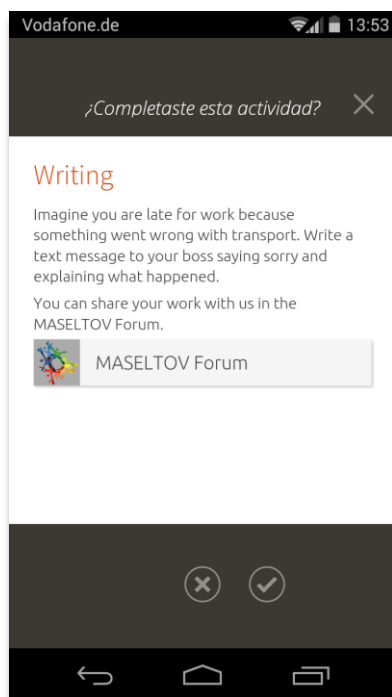

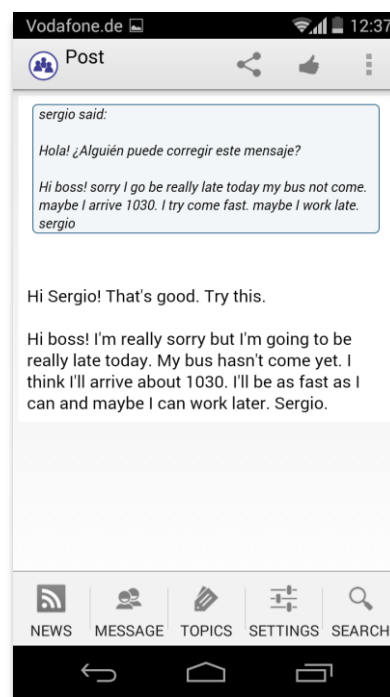**Figure 5: A writing task with a link to the forum**

Figure 6: Response to the writing task in the forum, with correction from a facilitator

As a constant reminder of the possibility of interacting with the MASELTOV community for the purpose of language learning, direct links to the discussion forum and also to the Facebook group page are visible on the first and last page of every lesson, and also inside challenges that encourage social interaction. The integration of these services lowers the barrier to interacting socially by making the process as effortless as possible for the user.

4.4 TEXTLENS

TextLens is a MASELTOV application that makes sense of text discovered in the real world. By taking a photo using the smartphone's camera, the application can recognise text in a picture and convert it into text that can be read. This text is then translated, using a freely available translation service (Wiktionary).

The TextLens app incorporates a common 'share' feature that allows users to conveniently post text, and in some cases the photograph taken, to a variety of communications media. This includes email, SMS, and Bluetooth, but also more public media such as a user's own

Facebook profile. It is also integrated with the MASELTOV forum, enabling a user to post the text discovered using the tool directly into the MASELTOV community. This sharing feature fosters community building by raising the possibility of discussions about shared issues. It also supports learning by enabling users to seek comment and assistance from peers and facilitators about language that they encounter in their daily lives.
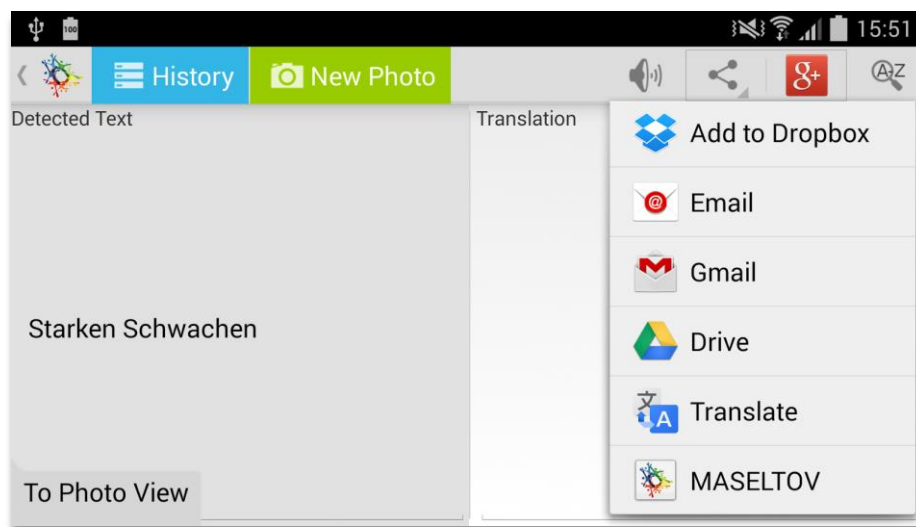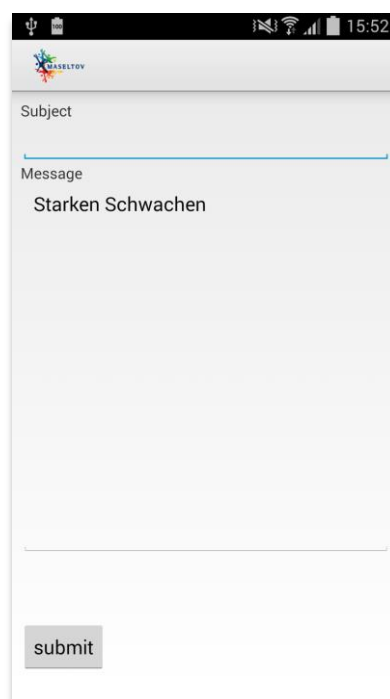

Figure 7: TextLens sharing function

Figure 8: Detected text retrieved and prepared for posting in the forum

5. RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS IN DELIVERABLE 7.5.1

(1) Encourage MASELTOV learners to participate in the MASELTOV social network spaces

Instigating active participation in the forum by as many users as possible is critical, as the benefit that each user derives from social tools is dependent on there being other users to communicate with. Participation will be boosted by the following:

- Designated areas in the forum for language learning inviting users to chat, participate in activities, share links and share their written work for feedback.
- Activities in the language lessons that prompt users to generate written work and share it in the forum.
- A direct link from the language lesson to the forum to make the switch between two tools as smooth as possible.
- The participation of facilitators to respond to users' posts, provide feedback and maintain discussions.
- A dedicated Facebook group for MASELTOV language learners with interesting and relevant content, (e.g. online language learning resources, events, news stories and a 'word of the day'); a direct link to this Facebook group from the language lessons. This page can be visited at https://www.facebook.com/groups/687362688000641/ .

(2) Encourage interactions between users; provide the basis for language learning episodes based on authentic situations.

Interaction between users is enabled by the functionality of the MASELTOV forum and by the functionalities offered by Facebook. It is encouraged by the following.

- Prompts and signposts in the forum (eg *"Tell us your three favourite things about life in the UK"*) designed to instigate lively discussion.
- The ability to share images and texts captured via TextLens. This functionality has been described in more detail in Section 4.4 above.
- Frequent invitations and ideas for forum participation built into the language lessons
- Activities in the language lessons are derived from authentic situations.

(3) Ways need to be found to provide initial feedback to users' contributions.

As described in the response to recommendation (1), instigation of active participation in the social tools is critical. That is why all efforts to encourage participation and interaction also help increase the likelihood that users will receive feedback on their initial contributions. The inclusion of facilitators in the project is also essential. Facilitators will play a vital role in responding to users posts and requests for assistance, ensuring that users are never discouraged from participating in the community.

(4) Sustainability of learning - after the initial impact of a new environments wears off will learning be sustained?

The participation of facilitator will play an important role in sustaining participation by ensuring conversations and threads are maintained, requests and posts are not left without response, and so encouraging more participation. They will also ensure a degree of sustainability by periodically making their own posts (via both the forum and Facebook) to provide information or points of interest to the community. This includes links to resources, events, or items as simple as a 'word of the day'.

The social activities built into the language lessons will also sustain use of the social tools as users encounter these at various points in their learning journeys. Completing these activities and sharing written work socially is not necessarily tied to the initial impact of the new environment.

(5) Mediation – how can learners be supported in a community?

The MASELTOV Description of Work includes plans for facilitators to have the principal role of supporting participants throughout their use of the MASELTOV services and assisting them with issues that they encounter. This is no less true with regard to their engagement with MASELTOV's social tools. According to this plan, facilitators will ensure that users' requests for information and advice are met, feedback is received when sought and that the forum is used in the appropriate manner.

(6) Evaluation of learning - what evaluation is offered and is it meaningful – and is it transparent to the learners?

The language lessons provide scores and instant feedback on learning progress. This was recommended as an essential learning element for the language learning material (see D7.5.1). Progress and learning scores are also visible in the User Profile (see D6.1.2 on progress indicators).

The development of a user community of MASELTOV learners will enable informal peer feedback of contributions to social spaces (e.g. MASELTOV forum, MASELTOV Facebook pages) where other users will provide feedback on written contributions in the target language when this is requested. This is a model that is successfully exploited by both commercial online language learning companies (e.g. busuu, Duolingo, Babbel, Livemocha) and also informally through online language learning interest groups.

6. SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

This deliverable has described the way that the objectives of this Task have been met through a combination of the MASELTOV discussion forum, Facebook, the work of facilitators during the trials and built-in features of the language lessons designed to stimulate social interaction. This has been achieved in the context of the withdrawal of the original project partner, busuu.com.

This task is linked closely with Task 7.5 and makes frequent reference to deliverable D7.5.1, in which recommendations for social/informal learning were made. Deliverable D8.3.3, as well as deliverable D7.5.2, have described how these ideas have been incorporated into the implementation and the extent to which expectations have been met.

The work of this task will support the final field trial due to take place in Graz and London in autumn 2014. These trials will inform on the success of the ideas proposed and implemented here and suggest ways that they can be revisited and revised. It is anticipated that following these extensive user trials, some update and refinement of the approach propsed here will be made before the end of the project.