



uugot.it: Solving Challenges of Integration with the Power of TV

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Abstract

uugot.it is solving the obstacles of language learning by giving people an innovative approach to access television. Students often find language courses dull as textbooks and learning videos are based on curated and not authentic content. At the same time course participants are being taught the standard language and cultural as well as societal peculiarities cannot be covered within language courses which leaves them with a stereotypical picture and often old-fashioned view of the country and its society. But language learning is more than just learning a language – it's about understanding the culture, it's about tearing down prejudices, and TV is the best source for that as it's a reflection of society. In fact uugot.it is able to solve societal challenges through the medium of television. Highly acclaimed by experts uugot.it solves obstacles of integration of migrants with a low threshold in a fun and easy way: Instead of attending integration courses people watch TV and thereby learn about the values and traditions of the host society. uugot.it thereby overcomes language barriers: uugot.it is a smartphone/tablet application that streams TV-broadcasts and equips them with interactive intralingual subtitles. If the user comes across a word he or she does not understand, the user can click on it and a contextual translation of the word is being displayed. Each word clicked is stored in the user's personal word catalog and can be retrieved later for learning purposes. uugot.it is designed as well for autodidacts as well as for language courses. Educational institutions like [Wiener Volkshochschulen](#), [VHS Linz](#) or bfi OÖ and universities like UNAM (MX), UFRP (BR) or UNRC (AR) already implemented uugot.it in their language courses or as a complementary source. In a meta-study on "Language Learning with Subtitles", the University of Vienna highlighted this approach as an essential tool for learning languages. Even today, 82% of those who learn English as a foreign language are also learning by means of TV and are using television as a medium of support. uugot.it optimizes this process.

Keywords: TV, interactive subtitles, integration, authentic content, broadcasts

Introduction

Since the latest migration wave, which flood over Europe, our systems and solidarity within the European Union member states have proved to be fragile. According to Eurostat, almost 4,3 million people applied for asylum within the EU-28 member states in the years 2014-2018 [1]. The majority comes from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, thus people from countries with different cultural backgrounds compared to the European hemisphere. Due to the political situation in the aforementioned countries, it is expected that a majority of the asylum seekers will get the possibility to stay in their host countries for a longer time, as it's likely that asylum will be granted to them. The endeavour of local governments to integrate the vast number of refugees seems to be stretched to their limits - one of the biggest challenges is the limited number of language courses, and – therefore - a long waiting period. In Germany and Austria the number of German as a Foreign Language teachers couldn't cover the demand, that's why civil society jumped in and took over. This is a necessary step, as measures of integration need to start from day 1 on. The risk that these migrants could find themselves in a negative spiral triggered by non-allocation to language courses and the exclusion from the labour market leads to demotivation and breaks the positive momentum to start over and become part of the new society [2]. Furthermore, migrants who pass the required language and integration exams are far from being integrated into the society, but further integration efforts are not available as too costly [3].

The stated challenges make clear - scalable solutions are needed.

This paper displays the results of the pilot phases we have run in Austria and Latin America and it shows how uugot.it can solve language and integration challenges on a large scale.

1. General

At peak times of the so-called refugee crisis, which took place in the years 2015-2017, people who were assigned to a German as a foreign language course needed to wait for more than 6-8 months, in some cases the waiting period exceeded 12 months. This was not a reason of slow public authorities,



but it had to do with the high influx of people who were trying to attend those courses. The number of course participants quintupled, while in less populated regions no infrastructure was available. At the main reception camp in Traiskirchen civil society - who helped out with German teaching - had to hold German-lessons in parks due to the lack of classrooms. In the meantime, the situation has improved especially as the number of incoming migrants has been dropping dramatically by the end of 2017.

Still, challenges exist. Asylum seekers who achieve B1 level – the threshold level to be reached in order to get a residency permit and full financial support – acquire the language basics, but they are far from being integrated into the host society. Fluency in a language is key to successful integration, together with involvement within the society. Integration courses, which every asylum seeker needs to attend, are seen as the solution. In the past, these courses consisted in one 8-hour block in which traditions, manners, values and equal rights of men and women were addressed. These courses have been introduced in the aftermath to the 2016 Cologne attacks [4] and should provide an orientation of how coexistence in European societies work. Within a few years after their introduction, some changes were applied as it turned out that these courses didn't lead to the expected effects. Parts of those courses were integrated into the curriculum of other courses in order to make participants familiar with these topics on a frequent basis. Still, relying on a course to convey values and traditions may not be a sustainable option for everyone. Paired with the fact that further integration efforts are not being provided as they would require high costs, different solutions need to be crafted in order to remedy shortcomings in integration.

The solution we are looking for should be scalable, low-threshold and ubiquitous. Soon we stumbled over a study conducted by Kaplan International, stating that 82% of English as a Foreign Language learners use TV as a source [5]. One of the co-founders at uugot.it had the same experience while studying in France in 2003. Compared to 2003, new and more technologically advanced devices such as smartphones and tablets are now available, enabling the development of uugot.it.

2. The solution

With uugot.it we have developed an innovative service that transforms every TV-broadcast or video into a language course. As social entrepreneurs, our goal is helping immigrants to access public discourse and, thereby, boost the integration process. uugot.it is connected to TV-broadcasters and streams their video content to smartphones or tablets, adding interactive intralingual subtitles so this means that German broadcasts are equipped with German subtitles. When a user comes across a word, he/she doesn't understand, he/she can click on that term and it will immediately be translated and stored within the learning section of the uugot.it app.



Figure 1: uugot.it application in use

Language learning is only one side of uugot.it, but the app also helps broadcasters offer their viewers a mirror of society. By making TV-broadcasts accessible to people who have difficulties understanding



the language, thanks to uugot.it the challenges of the local culture, its values and traditions become understandable. Via news, documentaries, talk-shows, uugot.it users learn about the host society, its emotional world and its mentality. Also, the possibility to watch broadcasts about migrants' countries of origin in a foreign language leads to a different point of view.

A central question that needed to be answered was whether subtitles improve language learning. The positive effects of the acquisition of the English language when consuming English content are well-known and backed by the results of Scandinavian countries, where Anglo-American films and series are not dubbed. This is reinforced by the observations of Dr. Krashen in the field of second language acquisition: people with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition [6]. People who want to learn while doing something they love, are higher motivated than those who only have the possibility to study on a textbook. The research study "UNTIS – Untertitel als Sprachlernwerkzeug" (Subtitles as tool for language learning) [7] -conducted by the University of Vienna - dedicated themselves to this topic. The conclusion of the meta-study - which included about 50 research studies and a test group of 4.540 people -was that the potential of subtitles for language learning is generally high.

3. Outcomes of uugot.it pilot phases

Description of the test environment

During the different development stages, uugot.it ran several pilot phases with a total number of 623 pilot users. The aim was to get immediate feedback from the users, in order to allow the development team to react and adapt future developments. Each phase was limited to 5 weeks and covered two different target-groups: German as a Foreign Language Learners (= users from Latin America) and German as a second language learners (= users from Austria).

The pilot phases took place at adult education institutions and universities:

In Austria:

- VHS Linz (from March 2017 on)
- bfi OÖ (two pilot phases in November 2017 and March 2018)
- VHS Wien (in October 2018)
- Flüchtlingsverein Ute Bock (in October 2018)

In Latin America:

- UNRC in Rio Cuarto in Argentina (from May 2017 on)
- UNAM in Mexico City in Mexico (from October 2017 on)
- UFPR in Curitiba in Brazil (from June 2018 on).

Whereas the participating universities in Latin America and VHS Wien used uugot.it sCOOLing, a version which had been especially designed for language courses, the other institutions didn't use uugot.it within their language courses but provided their course participants with uugot.it TV (without didactic material) as an additional language tool.

The pilot phases participants also differentiated in terms of educational background and language homogeneity - whereas students at the universities in Latin America all had the same L1 (Spanish or Portuguese), participants in Austria had a different L1. For data privacy reasons and the impossibility to verify the data, we did not ask the educational background of the participants, but as the majority of the course participants were unemployed refugees and migrants (a few expatriates were also participating), we can assume that the level of education of the Austrian group was lower compared to the one of the Latin American group, where all participants were in academic training. We did not run placement tests at the pilot phases, as educational institutions and universities only assigned students who had reached a certain level in a German language course, and passed with a certificate. During the pilot phase, all participants covered the levels A1-C1.

4. The outcome

uugot.it uses machine translation algorithms to translate the subtitles. The quality varies depending on the language pairs. In the closing survey, which was held at the end of each pilot phase, 80% of all students stated the implementation of further broadcasters is the most important feature that uugot.it needs to develop. Only when the content is attractive, users will use the application. 15% stated that



translation quality should be improved, but only according to 5% learning games need to be implemented into the uugot.it app. Although this last statement would suggest that users do not see uugot.it so much as a language learning tool, 70% were confident that uugot.it helped them improve their overall German language skills and 81% reported that their receptive abilities improved. A majority of users, mostly those who were living in Austria, meant that uugot.it helped them with a better understanding of local dialects.

During the pilot phases we only had implemented English from June 2017 on, Spanish from October 2017 on and Arabic from November 2017 on as translation languages. In case someone had another L1 than one of the three languages the proband needed to use English as a translation language. This worked quite well with the students from UFPR in Curitiba, Brazil, but we saw difficulties in Austria with the test groups there as their educational background was lower. We also made an interesting observation: Some probands, in that case female refugees from Afghanistan with L1 Dari/Farsi but almost no English knowledge, used the feature of uugot.it to slow down the pitch level (speed) in order that broadcasts were played at a lower speed. These women reported in an interview that, although they couldn't make use of the implemented translation languages, watching broadcasts with a reduced speed and reading the intralingual subtitles at the same time helped them to follow the broadcasts dramatically and improving their receptive skills.

94% of the participants who used uugot.it sCOOLing, an adapted version for in-class use, found that uugot.it brushed up the language course. 8 out of 9 educators who taught with uugot.it found that pupils were much more motivated and interested in the topics than without. 3 of the educators criticized that using uugot.it in class as a BYOD solution led to some noise as not all students used headphones. All 9 educators stated that uugot.it is a perfect addition for learning languages, 7 out of 9 assigned homework with uugot.it, 4 out of 9 used uugot.it for team exercises, all educators recommended watching TV or listening to the radio as a helpful tool in order to learn languages. Also interesting was the correlation between the educational background and the time spent on the app, as well as the means by which uugot.it was implemented. The usage by students of educational institutions, which only recommended uugot.it as an additive tool and who didn't use uugot.it in class nor for homework, was lower. Those institutions which used uugot.it in class and where users were embedded in an academic environment, had the highest usage. Still, implementing uugot.it in courses led to a higher usage than just recommending it.

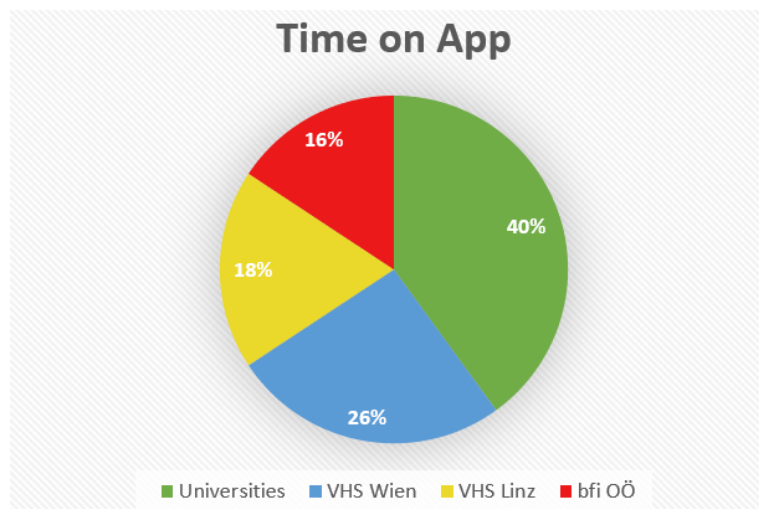


Figure 2 - uugot.it App usage. Universities (academic audience) as well as VHS Wien (non-academic audience) used uugot.it within class, VHS Linz and bfi OÖ only recommended uugot.it as an additional tool.

5. Imparting of cultural heritage

As there are around 8 times more Germans than people in other regions where German is spoken, the publishing market for educational material is much bigger. Therefore the German culture suppresses the Austrian, Swiss and South Tyrolean ones. By watching the Austrian National broadcaster (ORF), students from Mexico reported that they found it incredible to realize how Austrians differ in many ways from the Germans - they couldn't do these observations before. uugot.it also helped debunk some stereotypes- it is strongly believed that all Austrians can play the piano and ski at the same



time, or that all of Austria is covered with mountains. uugot.it could enlighten people and convey Austrian cultural heritage as well. Michaela Höller, University lecturer at UNAM University in Mexico City, reported that her students (B1+, B2 and C1 level in German) were able to distinguish between the Austrian variety and the standard German and that they were sensitised to recognize the differences. All lecturers thought that uugot.it is helpful to impart local knowledge and therefore is suitable in terms of integration efforts.

6. Conclusion

The lessons we have learnt with the pilot phases is that a digital tool, like an application, gains much reputation when it is implemented and used within the language course -usage times are much higher. Another premise we made is that the educator as well needs to be confident and convinced that a tool like uugot.it improves language learning. The same stands for users: uugot.it can't reach everyone - users who were forced to attend the German courses and only participated because they would otherwise be sanctioned, had a much lower usage or didn't use uugot.it at all. The higher the variety of content, the higher and the more likely the target group will use the app.

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