THE USE OF INTERACTIVE ONLINE PLATFORMS FOR INDEPENDENT LANGUAGE LEARNING AT UNIVERSITY

S. V. Solovjeva[a], T. R. Dudarev[b]

[a]*Belarusian State University,*
4 Niezaliezhnasci Avenue, Minsk 220030, Belarus, solovjevasv@bsu.by
[b]*Belarusian State University,*
4 Niezaliezhnasci Avenue, Minsk 220030, Belarus, fmo.dudarev@bsu.by

The article deals with the specifics of using popular digital platforms for independent foreign language learning in the context of university education. It provides an overview of the most wide-spread relevant online resources, discussing their advantages and disadvantages largely based on the authors' personal experience. The article contains a conclusion that resorting to various applications for independent language learning may be beneficial for improving the overall linguistic command on condition of regular and mindful use. At the same time, learning a foreign language for specific purposes requires extra individual efforts on the part of the students, and must be carried out under the supervision of experienced lecturers for them to master their professional foreign language competence in an optimum way.

Keywords: professional foreign language competence; interactive online platforms; artificial intelligence; receptive types of speech activity; productive types of speech activity.

ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ ИНТЕРАКТИВНЫХ ОНЛАЙН-ПЛАТФОРМ ДЛЯ САМОСТОЯТЕЛЬНОГО ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА В УНИВЕРСИТЕТЕ

С. В. Соловьёва[1)], Т. Р. Дударев[2)]

[1)]*Белорусский государственный университет,*
пр. Независимости, 4, 220030, г. Минск, Беларусь, solovjevasv@bsu.by
[2)]*Белорусский государственный университет,*
пр. Независимости, 4, 220030, г. Минск, Беларусь, fmo.dudarev@bsu.by

В данной статье рассматриваются особенности использования популярных цифровых платформ для самостоятельного изучения иностранных языков в контексте обучения в университете. В ней приводится обзор наиболее распространенных соответствующих онлайн-ресурсов и представлено, главным образом, авторское видение их преимуществ и недостатков. В работе сформулирован вывод о том, что использование различных приложений для самостоятельного изучения иностранного языка может быть полезным для улучшения общего лингвистического уровня при условии регулярного и осознанного использования. Вместе с тем, изучение языка специальности требует дополнительных усилий со стороны студентов под руководством опытных преподавателей в процессе совершенствования профессиональной иноязычной компетенции.

Ключевые слова: профессиональная иноязычная компетенция; интерактивные онлайн-платформы; искусственный интеллект; рецептивные виды речевой деятельности; продуктивные виды речевой деятельности.

The recent years saw a rise in the popularity of the use of various interactive online platforms for learning foreign languages across the world. This may be explained by the process of globalisation and the growing understanding of the importance of knowing foreign languages for effective intercultural communication and professional advancement. The development of modern information technologies made the process of language learning accessible to a wide audience: today some interactive online platforms include millions of users. For instance, *Duolingo* as the most downloaded application for independent language learning lists over 500 million users up to date [1].

Other relevant online platforms include *Rosetta Stone, Memrise, Babbel, Cake, LinguaLeo*, etc. [2; 3]. It has to be said that these resources involve artificial intelligence technologies and enable self-paced individualised language learning. Their number is on the increase while the learning options and special features are being constantly upgraded. For example, *LinguaLeo*, which lists over 17 million active users, offers a wide selection of texts, educational podcasts, exercises for self-check, options for creating individual glossaries and vocabulary lists, and an abundance of authentic linguistic materials [3]. This interactive online platform is chiefly aimed at learners of English. Such a platform as *Cake* contains adapted video material from YouTube which includes extracts from popular movies and series. It allows its users to watch the podcasts with subtitles at a varying speed and check their understanding while doing post-watching tasks [3]. All the learners are rated based on their performance, which adds an element of competition to the whole process and makes it more exciting.

Most of the interactive online platforms for learning foreign languages can offer free versions as well as more advanced options for a subscription fee. The prices are generally competitive. Moreover, they often run both on desktops and on smartphones. Some online platforms mainly focus on English, like that of the *British Council*. However, resources like *Duolingo* or *Babbel* may offer to learn multiple languages to their users. What unites most of the modern interactive online platforms for language learning is gamification of the educational process. Such a feature makes it attractive for Generation Z students, also known as the "digital natives," whose key characteristic is connected with the intensive use of modern information technologies on various portable gadgets.

Accessibility is another benefit associated with the use of interactive online platforms for learning foreign languages. Their mobile versions allow Generation Z representatives to study on the go, and, in a way, that elicits a positive emotional response. The growth in the quantity of interactive online platforms for language learning creates more opportunities to choose from. User-friendly interface is another factor which can boost motivation.

Quite a number of students of the faculty of international relations are working additionally on their linguistic skills with the help of a free version of *Duolingo*, the most popular language learning app in the world. As a rule, they opt for the languages they haven't studied before, but need to learn from the beginner's level and quickly proceed ahead. They take advantage of the

platform's another feature: an opportunity to follow each other's accounts and thus monitor day-to-day progress of the people on their friend list. The platform offers additional quests for mutual subscribers, which allows learners to win extra scores in a competition for a better place in their relevant language leagues that are being revised every week.

Duolingo developers claim that completing 5 sections of a target foreign language course is comparable to 5 semesters of university instruction [4]. However, regular use of the free version of the mentioned platform for the past 2 years led the authors of this article to the conclusion that the developers' estimation looks way too optimistic while paying tribute to some obvious advantages. It has to be mentioned that the hands-on experience of learning French with *Duolingo* has undoubtedly helped the authors of this article to increase the scope of vocabulary related to situations of everyday communication and master the basic grammar; apart from that, it improved their skills of listening comprehension. For instance, one can mention better understanding of various educational podcasts on YouTube like speech simulations of DELF and DALF examinations after practising with *Duolingo*. In addition, the platform may provide a sense of achievement: the exercises look very simple at the beginning. Completing such options as «match» and «fill in the gaps» creates an impression of the job done and progress being made, the platform is equipped with special technical features that enable instant gratification to the users if they make the right choices.

At the same time, we have identified a number of weak points associated with learning a foreign language solely with this platform. First and foremost, it focuses on training the receptive types of speech activity: listening and reading comprehension. The productive types of speech activity — speaking and writing — might need a lot of additional practice to live up to a university level. While the platform's playful content may be useful for learning grammar, the semantic aspect of some sentences created by artificial intelligence may give rise to questions about their pragmatics. For instance, such a sentence as '*Your bear drinks beer*' is grammatically correct, but it is hard to imagine a communicative context where it can be used. In a free version, one cannot learn a new topic unless one has finished a previous unit. So, if you need the vocabulary on the topic "Employment", for example, it does not mean that you will access it in a concentrated form on *Duolingo*. If your current unit deals, let us say, with outdoor activities, you will need to finish this particular topic first. Consequently, it makes sense to supplement the process of learning a foreign language with other resources and tools.

What is more, there is little cognitive complexity at more advanced levels. The platform offers repetitive grammar exercises, which may reduce motivation to some extent. Finally, one cannot learn the language for specific purposes on Duolingo. This requires extra individual efforts on the part of the students under the supervision of a competent lecturer.

The conclusion which can be formulated in respect of using interactive online platforms for independent language learning in the context of university

education may be as follows. On the one hand, it may be quite beneficial as an additional form of extracurricular activity. Playful content and user-friendly interface might boost motivation for learning foreign languages, especially everyday vocabulary in common use. We believe that as a form of an intellectual pastime it is more useful than playing cyber games as you learn some new vocabulary in the process. On the other hand, most of such platforms are not infallible and have their own restrictions and specifics. One should not be misled by generous promises of attaining a university level due to the increased efficiency of various learning tools and technical features. Catchy slogans are often alienated from reality because knowing a foreign language at a professional level presupposes confident use of specialised vocabulary, for example, fluent use of economic or legal terms based on the requirements of the relevant educational standards. This needs perseverance and systemic auditory work at university on the professional foreign language competence under the supervision of well-prepared lecturers.

БИБЛИОГРАФИЧЕСКИЙ СПИСОК

1. Emery, Ch. Duolingo review: is Duolingo really that great? / Ch. Emery // Langoly. — 08.10.2022. — URL: https://www.langoly.com/duolingo-review/ (date of access: 30.09.2024).

2. Vlaskova, A. D. Artificial intelligence in language education: analyzing benefits and limitations of contemporary learning platforms / A. D. Vlaskova, D. A. Prytkova, A. A. Yegorova // Современные научные знания: материалы III междунар. науч. конф., Пенза, 20 мая 2024 г. — Пенза: Наука и просвещение, 2024. — P. 158—162.

3. Павлова, А. В. Анализ современных онлайн-платформ для изучения иностранного языка / А. В. Павлова // Творчество молодых: сборник научных работ студентов, магистрантов и аспирантов. В 3 ч. Ч. 3 / редкол.: Р. В. Бородич [и др.]; Министерство образования Республики Беларусь, Гомельский государственный университет им. Ф. Скорины. — Гомель: ГГУ им. Ф. Скорины, 2023. — С. 63—65.

4. Duolingo Works // Duolingo. — URL: https://www.duolingo.com/efficacy (date of access: 30.09.2024).