



# Personalizing Duolingo

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April 2015

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I reviewed the use of Duolingo with my experimental Linguistics & Languages class at the end of the Fall 2014 semester. As we approach the end of the Spring 2015 semester, it's perhaps the right time to write a little addendum.

Duolingo is moving users away from the 3-strikes-you-out system of passing a language lesson. This means the "lives" symbolized by the three red hearts have disappeared from the user interface or will disappear soon. Since purchasing an extra heart - to get an extra life - was one of the most practical uses for lingots, it's time to find new ways to spend lingots.

But first, what should be free?

## Progress quizzes

It would be very handy if users did not have to pay for progress quizzes. Then students and teachers (as well as independent learners) could use the progress quizzes for pre- and post-tests, checking on progress, noticing natural slippage and the need for review, and perhaps fueling motivation.

Alternately, there could be a feature for teachers using Duolingo in the classroom to open quizzes for students without paying lingots, but really, why the extra work? Just make the progress quizzes available to everyone, any time.

Now, some ideas about what lingots could buy.

## Trophies

It would be nice as a teacher – and this can

Streak notice – 10, 50, 100

Self award

Explorer award

Immersion

Etc ...

Sort of have this in giving a lingot as thanks for a helpful discussion or answer ....

### **Commercialized store**

Lingots for a stuffed Duo? Or a reduction in price for a stuffed Duo, a tshirt, etc ...

### **Social conscience store**

Lingots back to Duolingo for a donation on Duolingo's part to free or subsidized language testing in countries that require it for advancing in jobs ...

Could set up international lingot earning days, in fact, where all lingots earned for 24 hours go into one pool and those lingots go for a social conscience expense ...

### **Personalized lessons**

From what I have read about Duolingo, an algorithm tailors lessons at least to some degree for each individual user, based on individual performance. I cannot say that I notice this experience, if indeed it is happening. It may be so good that I can't tell, or perhaps because I have no comparison to what Duolingo is like without it I don't notice it. Or perhaps it doesn't really work so well.

I have an additional take on personalization, that might interest users and at the same time be a little more in line with best practice in second language instruction. This is probably something that programmers have heard, or if not, the second language acquisition folks also have in mind. The idea also gives users a way to spend their lingots, because currently you can rack 'em up easier than you can spend 'em.

I'm thinking of a store of additional lessons within each language. Say a user is studying German literature in an undergraduate language course. She might purchase lessons based on a particular author she is studying. Let's say she purchases, at 20 lingots each, three sets of lessons for Max Frisch, the Swiss author and playwright. One Lesson is Frisch: Quotes, one is Frisch: Biography, and one is Frisch: Scenes. Of course, there could be many other authors in the store as well.

Another user might be a movie fan. A number of lessons are available, each on a different movie, with quotes and descriptions of the most well-known scenes – maybe some info about the actors.

I imagined some other learner profiles in Table 1 and what the users might be interested in. I'm sure you'd have some to add to the list as well.

TABLE 1: Hypothetical Duolingo user profiles and lessons they might like to purchase

Learner profile	Interesting lessons to purchase
Undergrad studying literature	Famous Author · Quotes, biography, scenes
Movie fan	Famous movies · Quotes, scenes, actors
Sports fan	Teams · Specific terminology, Specific players, famous moments, rivalries,
Tourist preparing for a trip	Specific Cities · Famous locations, famous residents, moments in history
Artist	Famous painters · Biographies, descriptions of famous paintings
Your idea?	
Another of yours?	

While I'm sure the coordination of volunteer authors creates a mountain of work in Pittsburgh, the mechanisms are certainly all in place to construct additional lessons, and the only a small percent of worldwide users need to be interested in creating lessons.

In this system, learners can work on the basic tree, with its approximately 2,000 words, and also personalize a tree of their own by purchasing the type of lessons they are interested in.

And a final note. Duolingo can be rightly criticized that much of the lessons have no thematic connection (but rather a grammatical one) and only a loose connection in the topic area lessons. Further, while users can choose to do or not do a lesson, at some point they must complete a lesson to move to the following lesson. The personalized tree allows users (1) to learn according to their interest, a good motivational plus, (2) to think in interconnected thematic chunks, a plus for memory through association, and (3) to capitalize on the existing gamification of Duolingo, which is perhaps the single most important helping it outpace platforms like Babbel and FluentU.

Before I wind up my year of teaching Linguistics & Languages to high school students, I'm going to ask them to think as creatively as possible for additional uses of the lingots they have earned. Stay tuned for any break-through ideas they might have.

**ASK THE STUDENTS TO READ THIS when their attention for thinking up creative lingot ideas is wavering.**

Finish the article by inserting their creative ideas here:

student idea

student idea

student idea

Bullet points:

I think that duolingo is really good website in learning different languages and its free.

But there is different things that can be improved in Duolingo.

For example”

1) Duolingo can create different games that is related to language and its should be funny so people will be interested in it.

2) duolingo can make a web camera so people can speak which each other in that language that they are learning. Its like a skype but in duolingo. So people can help each other in learning different languages. Also I think its great idea because speaking in duoling its not so good and my new idea i think will help them.

3) Also i want to see in duolingo different funny movies for different ages and different level of their language. It would be really cool to sit down and to see movies that will teach you a new language.

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