XIMPEL STUDENTS' GAME

Anna Mechlińska

student nr 1731718

IMM 08213

Abstract

Amsterdam is one of the most entertaining cities in the world. You can choose between many different activities here. It attracts a lot of tourists and everybody, coming here even just for the weekend, can revel in its opportunities.

On the other hand, there are two reputable universities (Vrije Universiteit and Universiteit van Amsterdam), that draw students from all over the world. They are coming here to do their Master studies or just for one or two semesters within the framework of Erasmus exchange programme. All in all, finally they also take advantage of Amsterdam's entertainment and enjoy it. Sometimes it can finish in unexpected way.

I have created an interactive video game, that can help students to decide, if it is a good idea to study in the Netherlands. This paper is to show how does the game work and how it was made.

Introduction

The interactive video game for exchange students in Amsterdam was made using XIMPEL, which stands for *eXtensible Media Player for Entertainment and Learning*. There are used movies from YouTube. In the latter part of this essay you can find out what was the reason for making such a game and how was it made (technical background). I will also discuss my design choices, characterize possible scenarios and results and finally, elaborate a little bit on XIMPEL platform itself.

Background

The reason for making an interactive video is not very elaborate. It was just my project for Introduction Multimedia course on the Vrije Universiteit. However, it became something more than just a movie, I decided to change it into a funny game. Thanks to that my work was not arduous, I enjoyed it a lot. Most of the efforts was to devise nice scenarios and find movies on YouTube that would fit. The programming part was much easier for me, since I know XML language, that XIMPEL is working on.

Technical background

The game works as a .swf file, so you need Flash Player in your browser to play. The main file is an XML file, you can see part of it here:

```xml
<subject name="Introduction">
  <longname>Students coming to Amsterdam</longname>
  <score>0</score>
     <videos>
     <video file="01"/>
     <video file="02">
     <question>Do you attend non-obligatory courses?</question>
     <rightanswer>true</rightanswer>
     </video>
     <video file="03" repeat="true">
       <branchquestion>It is after lessons. What are you doing now?</branchquestion>
       <overlays>
       <overlay position="03" size="22" label="Learning" position2="31" size2="22"
            label2="Beer"/>
       </overlays>
     </video>
     </videos>
</subject>
```

Except XML files, I could also change style of XIMPEL Player, using .css file. You can read more about it in the next section.

Design choices

My first idea was to make movies on my own, so I have the same actors. Then I could have more effect on the content of my interactive video. Showing the same faces during whole game would be also a better design choice. However, I did not manage, because my camera was broken. I was forced to find videos just on YouTube. It was not easy, as my game was ready and needed only appropriate movies. I think, that the final version is one of the best possible, taking into consideration the fact, that I could not film on my own.

Some of the videos were cut and I use only fragments of them to put emphasize on important details. Some of them were very long (even 10 minutes), so they didn't fit to my project. However, they were showing exactly the things that I wanted to present, so I decided to use just parts of them.

There are also movies made in VisionLab Studio just from the pictures that I found on the Web and then converted from .avi to .flv. In the beginning I intended to find all the videos on YouTube, but finally noticed, that it is not so easy, even if there are millions of them on this website. In the end it was also conscious decision to put just static pictures, that are not diverting players' attention from important questions.

The movies are in different languages, as I was looking for them not only with English keywords, but also Polish. Thanks to that, I attained the impression of multilingual and international game - what is even desirable if it concentrates on exchange students.

The excess of funny movies about drinking and going party, what is maybe not a good choice as for a university project, was also intended. My aim was to make this interactive video entertaining and create something, that will make people laugh (and I hope I succeeded...). I concentrated especially on entertainment typical for Amsterdam, like Coffeeshops or Red Light District. Also the first two movies from intro (plane coming to Schiphol and a tour on VU campus) show that my interactive video is connected with

this city. Of course, students in other countries also have similar temptations and could play my game.

When you play, you can see that it is much harder to become graduated student, than finish as a drunk man on the street. There is only one way to finish your studies. Most of the ways lead to the street... It is kind of a joke in my game, however, it can show you that it is really hard to be a perfect student and you can forget about studying very easily! That is also why you can not make more decisions in some parts of my game, e.g. when you decided to drink Vodka, you are lost...

I decided to take the opportunity that we can change Ximpel Player, using css file and ximpelApp.mxml. I have not changed a lot, but just put other pictures and different text. I used a picture of the world in the background (it symbolizes international students) and a girl (that is in fact an exchange student...) drinking Tequila in the welcoming screen. I have also personalized the title and instructions of my interactive video.

Scenarios

There are different scenarios in my game. There are two possible ending videos and three different results. Most of the videos are from YouTube, however, some of them are cut to be shorter or to put more emphasize on important details. There are also some short .flv files created from pictures from Google.

The game starts with intro. There are two movies:
- plane coming to Schiphol: *http://youtube.com/watch?v=cU_FKmiGGic*
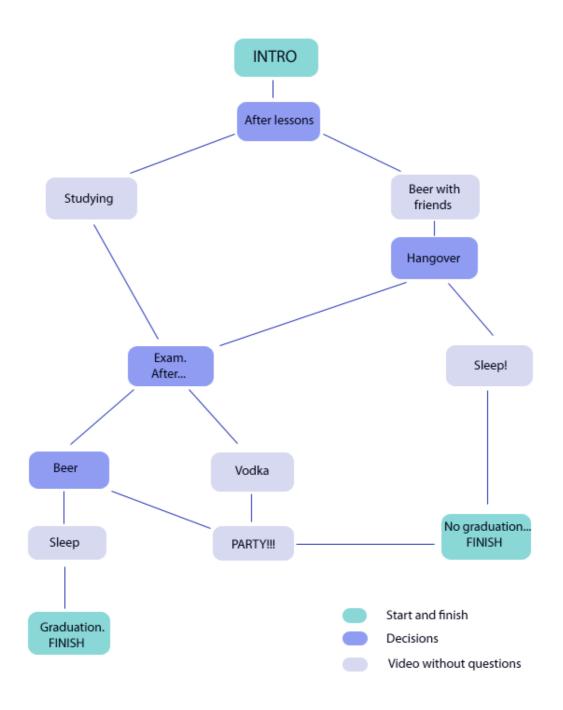- short tour on VU Campus: *http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtDiF6yK-pM&NR=1*

After intro you have the possibility to make your first decision. What are you doing after lessons? Do you go for a beer with your Erasmus friends or you prefer to go home to study? We use movies: *http://youtube.com/watch?v=EFMystTebwY* (the first option) and *http://youtube.com/watch?v=CChR7w8Ldpw* (the second option).

If you chose first option, the next day you have a horrible hangover (*http://youtube.com/watch?v=8NYeYq-cbOc*). You can decide if you are going for the exam or maybe it is better to stay at home and sleep? If you stay

(*http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U7AoFaxomA&NR=1*) you are not going to graduate! You will finish like a man in the movie (*http://youtube.com/watch?v=aJDVR22A_EE*)!

"Exam" is the next decision video (*http://youtube.com/watch?v=V5iWOonffMw*). You were at the exam if you had decided to go for it despite your hangover or if the day before you went home to study instead of going for a beer. However, after exam you have to celebrate it again! Do you want to do it in a nice, calm way (*http://youtube.com/watch?v=4v7HLZSzY4Q*) or you prefer to drink few bottles of vodka (*http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaO31LreQoE*)? The second option does not give you any choice later. You are going to the city center and party all night in all possible ways (*http://youtube.com/watch?v=YSAAJLuah5s, http://youtube.com/watch?v=eCN9KevQFiA, http://youtube.com/watch?v=0zAYihYjnXE*). It ends like the first scenario (when you stayed home with your hangover). If you decided to celebrate in a nice way, after few beers you can choose if you will go party or it is better to go sleep. The first option ends the same as after drinking vodka. The second one is the only way to finish as graduated student (*http://youtube.com/watch?v=iIyR4MkA6xs*).

There are 3 possible results based on your score. You can be a really good student, but do not have anything from student's life... You can also forget totally about your education and party all the time, what is also not good. There is also the middle - you can study and party!

All these scenarios you can find in a story graph below.

Diagram nodes and connections:

- INTRO → After lessons
- After lessons → Studying
- After lessons → Beer with friends
- Studying → Exam. After...
- Beer with friends → Hangover
- Hangover → Exam. After...
- Hangover → Sleep!
- Exam. After... → Beer
- Exam. After... → Vodka
- Beer → Sleep
- Beer → PARTY!!!
- Vodka → PARTY!!!
- Sleep! → No graduation... FINISH
- PARTY!!! → No graduation... FINISH
- Sleep → Graduation. FINISH

Legend:
- Start and finish
- Decisions
- Video without questions

XIMPEL platform

Using the XIMPEL platform occurred to be a really nice work. In the beginning I thought that it will be very complicated if we can create such advanced interactive videos with XIMPEL. But when I started to learn how to do it, I saw that this platform is really very easy to use. If you know a little bit of XML, you will manage. It is much harder to think of a funny game and find good movies, than just write an .xml file that will create an interactive video application in XIMPEL.

The platform is already very useful and you can create advanced applications with it. It is simple, but you just have to try different things and see how far your programmer's imagination can lead you.

It could be improved in some fields, like for example it could support more file types. I would also try to increase the amount of possible overlays per video, because now there are only 3. The next nice thing to have, would be a possibility of multiple questions per video.

Clip

Except interactive video I made also a short clip that promotes the concept of my game. The idea was that the viewer should enjoy it without any interaction. I made it in Adobe After Effects, using different transformations of pictures and text. In the beginning I wanted to do it using videos from my game, but unfortunately Adobe After Effects does not support .flv files. I tried to convert it to .avi, but it still did not work. After trying several different options, I decided to create this clip only with pictures. They are just screen shots of the movies. When the clip was ready, I converted it into .flv.

I wanted my clip to draw viewer's attention. I decided to write there some text except photos. There is a lot of open questions that make the viewer think. Do you know how is it to be a student? How hard is their life? What do they have to do? What kind of a student are YOU? These questions are to encourage the viewer to play my game.

Conclusion

Everybody that knows at least a little bit about XML can become familiar with XIMPEL application. It can give you a lot of joy to create your own interactive video. My game is such an example. My friends really liked it and they would like to do something similar on their own. It is not only fun, but you can also learn XML and more. I think I am going to use this application in the future to do some other university projects or just for fun.