

Commercial Language Learning System Analysis  
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ENG200

Pimsleur is a purely-audio based learning method that places an emphasis on speaking and understanding everyday conversations. I will be conducting an analysis on the Pimsleur Method by attempting to learn Russian. I spent three days using Pimsleur, in total spending about 120 minutes studying.

The Pimsleur Method has been commercialized by <https://www.pimsleur.com/>. Each language is broken down into multiple units which you need to purchase individually. A unit is about \$150 US each and composes of 30 half-hour videos.

### **Lesson Breakdown**

The lesson starts off by making you listen to a short conversation in Russian and then spends the rest of the lesson breaking down each dialogue line. By the end of the lesson, you are able to understand the entire conversation as well as say it yourself. I find this very awesome. You learn a bunch of basic vocabulary (English, Russian, I, you, yes, no, to understand etc) and how to piece these together to form an utterance.

Whenever a new word is encountered, they break down the sounds and have you repeat it a bunch of times, slowly working up to a sentence. As the lesson progresses, they also keep asking you to recall previously learned words, almost like a spaced repetition system.

Although grammar is not formally taught, they do explain on a surface level how to form structures like the negative form and such.

It seemed quite clear that the main focus of Pimsleur is to get you speaking in an actual conversation, developing your comprehension, production and pronunciation. I also find it great that you can learn vocabulary in context as well as gets lots of input right away.

In future lessons, they also spend quite a lot of time reviewing previously covered material. There is a big review session (like 10 minutes) of the previous lesson, and in addition intersperses the rest of the lesson with more review questions.

This begs us to question how much we are actually learning and if we are given a false sense of progress. It is also important to think about what the right ratio between learning new content and review should be.

### **Pimsleur Premium**

Pimsleur Premium gives you access to the audio lessons as well as their platform which comes with a bunch of mini-practice quizzes and other features that compliment the lesson. Here are some of the materials that are provided along with the actual audio lesson.

Voice coach gives you some audio and has you record yourself saying it. They will then run some analysis and grade your pronunciation and let you know what mistakes you made. This feature did not work super well for me (although it may have just been an issue with my device). I find this the most useful and intriguing feature the platform offers as it will let you isolate and identify the issues in your speech automatically. I am unsure how good the grading system is however, since I do not know Russian and cannot comment on the feedback I was provided.

Although Pimsleur Method has a heavy emphasis on speaking and pronunciation, they do try to squeeze a bit of reading practice in. In this section, they make you read a bunch of sample words and they also provide an explanation when there is a new sound or character that is introduced. This is pretty great for introducing you to the sounds that an English speaker would not be used to making.

The flashcards feature is a quite bare bones flashcard system that quizzes you on the contents of the lesson. There are numerous fully featured and customizable flashcard applications out there that would be better to use.

Quick Match is a simple multiple choice quiz based on contents of lesson. This also feels very bare bones and shallow. Primary used as a quick review.

Speak Easy is just a transcript of the conversation that was introduced in the lesson. It lets you play back each speaker's dialogue line.

Finally, the Speed Round is the same as quick match but has some falling blocks that you need to answer before it hits the ground. This feels very shallow and a weak attempt at gamifying the review.

As a summary, most of the review features the platform offers seem quite shallow, with potentially the exception of the voice coach. My recommendation would perhaps be to create your own flashcards from the content of the lesson in you own flash card application. At the end of the day, I believe that these little quizzes are passable for a quick review but perhaps only provide a sense of progress rather than giving any actual learning value.

### **Verdict**

If you wanted to learn a language to use when you go on vacation or do a study abroad term somewhere and would like to be able to understand simple speech and produce some not very foreign sounding speech of your own, I think that Pimsleur is great for that.

However, If you wanted to learn a language a bit more seriously and would like to be able to read, write, and understand the grammar formally, I would suggest pairing Pimsleur with a textbook or some other more formal learning resource. Pimsleur would primarily offer you language input and also an opportunity to produce some language output. However, in the grand scheme of things, Pimsleur does not offer enough content for the language nor teaches it to you fast enough to warrant using it on it's own.

As for the actual Pimsleur Method itself, I feel like it does quite a good job at getting you ready to participate in a conversation. It felt quite good to be able to say a bunch of sentences and common words after just the first half hour lesson. After a couple more lessons, I was able to respond to questions they asked me quite close to real time as well.

Besides the hefty price tag and the subpar online review content, I have no particular qualms with this method. I feel that if I were to pick up a new language, I would definitely consider building Pimsleur into my study routine.

Being a primarily audio based learning method, I would also question how well visual-spatial learners would learn using this system, as there is practically a complete lack of visual-spatial information. Personally I felt very comfortable with the audio-only approach. However, there are other learning methods (like Rosetta Stone) that are almost completely based on providing visual-spatial information.