Designing strategies for an efficient language MOOC

Maria Perifanou[1]

Abstract. The advent of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has dramatically changed the way people learn a language. But how can we design an efficient language learning environment for a massive number of learners? Are there any good practices that showcase successful Massive Open Online Language Course (MOOLC) design strategies? According to recent research findings (Perifanou & Economides, 2014; Perifanou, 2015) there is not an ideal MOOLC platform that can offer a successful massive open online interactive language learning environment. Most of the current MOOLCs are following the traditional model of xMOOCs that is based on a cognitive behavioral pedagogical model, but there are also few examples that embrace the connectivist version, i.e. the cMOOC model (like Instreamia, Mixxer, OpenLearning, etc.). This paper aims to facilitate the work of language teachers and language and training providers who wish to design and create successful massive open online and interactive language courses for all. First, it presents the Massive Open Online Interactive Language Learning Environment (MOILLE) questionnaire analyzing the key steps in order to design a successful LangMOOC[2]. Next, it showcases specific examples of successful LangMOOC activities and other platforms' features. In the end, the paper provides few useful and practical tips for the MOOLCs designers.

Keywords: MOOCs, MOOLCs, foreign language learning, language education.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, language competence and intercultural skills are more than ever before key qualifications for every citizen in every part of the world. Professional development, cultural awareness, mobility facilitation and social skills building are only a few of the benefits that language literacy can bring. According to

1. University of Macedonia, CONTA Lab, Thessaloniki, Greece; mariaperif@gmail.com
2. More information on the EU funded project LangMOOC can be found at https://www.langmooc.com/; the LangMOOC project is also discussed in Perifanou (2016, this volume)

How to cite this article: Perifanou, M. (2016). Designing strategies for an efficient language MOOC. In S. Papadima-Sophocleous, L. Bradley & S. Thouësny (Eds), *CALL communities and culture – short papers from EUROCALL 2016* (pp. 380-385). Research-publishing.net. https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.eurocall2016.592

Perifanou, Holotescu, Andone, and Grosseck (2014), "the main barriers to learn a language are lack of time and motivation, and [the] expense of language courses" (n.p.; see also Andrade et al., 2011). But how easy is it to cover the linguistic needs of a big number of people taking under consideration the above language learning barriers? For the past few years, open education initiatives, such as MOOCs and Open Educational Resources (OERs), have brought about a turning point in the field of language learning as they can easily provide free language education at a large scale with no time and space limitations. MOOCs could be characterized as an innovative educational movement with promising potential but it is still in the middle of an ongoing process. Open education initiatives such as MOOLCs seem to be a promising solution as they give the opportunity to a massive number of learners to learn for free the language of their choice with no space and time limitations.

Research has shown that the key to successful language learning lies in interaction, co-creation, community building and networking (Beaven et al., 2013; Rubio, 2015). The pedagogical philosophy of MOOLCs is connected ideally to the original MOOC, connectivist MOOC (cMOOC), which was built on peer-to-peer learning, autonomy, social networking diversity, openness, emergent knowledge, and interactivity (Mackness, Mak, & Williams, 2010). Research has shown that there is an increasing need for MOOLCs but there are no designing formulas for the creation of efficient language courses for massive number of learners (Perifanou & Economides, 2014). In the following sections this paper aims to propose a questionnaire that can be used as a guide by MOOLC developers, designers and teachers who wish either to create or to evaluate their own MOOC platforms or courses. A few examples and useful tips are also provided.

2. MOILLE framework and questionnaire

The MOILLE questionnaire (Table 1) was created based on the MOILLE framework in accordance to its six key criteria: (1) content, (2) pedagogy, (3) assessment, (4) communication, (5) technical infrastructure, and (6) financial issues (Perifanou & Economides, 2014; Perifanou, 2015). The questionnaire can guide developers, instructive designers or language teachers who plan to design and create an interactive online learning environment for language learners at a massive scale. This questionnaire can be also used as an evaluation tool simply with the addition of a four-point rating scale (high, medium, low, none degrees) to the end of each question or subquestion.

Table 1. The MOILLE questionnaire

CONTENT
Does the MOOC platform/course:
Q1. support the use and creation of authentic language resources?
Q2. allow user generated content and OER integration/production?
Q3. support textual and highly interactive (multimedia) material?
Q4. support a variety of activities (individual, group, networked) with clear goals that can promote all basic language skills and cultural awareness?
PEDAGOGY
Does the MOOC platform/course:
Q1. support (technically/pedagogically) different types of communication (peer-peer, student-teacher, group-group, open community-natives)?
Q2. promote collaboration and collective intelligence (group projects, forums, etc.)?
Q3. support autonomous and personalized learning activities (autonomous/ self paced/self regulated/personal skills based/reflective learning)?
Q4. increase motivation and engagement via interesting, playful, interactive and often updated activities (playful/game based learning)?
Q5. provide teachers' support during the learning process (number of teachers)?
ASSESSMENT
Does the MOOC platform/course:
Q1. support multiple levels of assessment (peer-peer, student-teacher, open, automated) during the whole learning process (pre/ongoing/final assessment)?
Q2. support 'open' ongoing assessment actions such as comments, reviews, 'likes', shares in social media, or an award automated system for badges and karma?
Q3. support visualization of the learning progress (evidence-based improvement with data mining, learning analytics)?
COMMUNICATION
Does the MOOC platform/course:
Q1. offer social community building features (social media, forums, my personal network, third party tool integration and other tech tools, etc.) that can ensure massiveness and openness?
Q2. promote communication with native speakers?
TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE
Does the MOOC platform/course:
Q1. provide tech infrastructure for asynchronous (private messaging, email, etc.) and synchronous (chat, video conference, etc.) communication?
Q2. support technically OER integration/production?
Q3. support interoperability with other devices (tablet, mobile)? and social media/social network integration (blog, wiki, Facebook, etc.)?
Q4. have a good technical performance with a massive number of participants?
Q5. provide a high security system in many levels (identification system, clear copyright and intellectual property ownership and usage, payment system for concrete services such as certification, ECTS, etc.)?
Q6. offer good usability/personal dashboard (bookmarking, notes, friends, messages, my SM, my content, my grades, etc.)?

Q7. support technologically a multi-level assessment/award system (peer-peer, automated self evaluation, badges, karma, learning analytics, etc.)?
FINANCIAL ISSUES
Does the MOOC platform/course:
Q1. have low costs for its development, implementation and maintenance?
Q2. support certification/accreditation solutions or extra services at low cost?
Q3. potentially have chances to lead to a successful business plan?

3. MOOLC practices: successful examples, useful tips

3.1. Examples of successful LangMOOC activities and interesting features of MOOLC platforms

MOOLC instructional designers should explore successful MOOLC activities that could inspire them to create their own courses. For example:

- Thematic chats or face-to-face instant communication among language peers and teachers using Google Hangouts in groups of ten maximum: the activity should have a predefined topic, time and type of communication such as a self-presentation activity using text, live video or audio. This can be used in combination with general discussion forums. News feeds and an email notification system on all important class activities are also proposed just like in a social network in order to personalize the learning schedule (EdX MOOC platform, Instreamia).

- Authentic oral communication with native speakers via the free voice over IP phone program Skype (Mixxer platform).

- Creation and use of OER's rich content (Eliademy platform).

Interesting features of MOOC platforms that may facilitate the language learning process are the following:

- *Personal study calendar* where each student can find all assigned courses, quizzes and deadlines (Eliademy), *visualization of daily learning progress* based on different language skills and *progress report* that presents all activities and rates (Instreamia).

- Gamification of the learning process and assessment: the learner earns a variety of badges for every completed task, participation, peers' support, etc. (UNED coma).

- Interoperability of the MOOLC platform with other devices.

- Strong community features: social media, third party tool integration, etc.

3.2. Useful tips for MOOLC designers

A promising MOOLC platform should promote a cMOOCs' pedagogy via a variety of tech functionalities that can support collaboration, communication, and authentic and autonomous learning (Perifanou & Economides, 2014). It is though highly recommended that language teachers as well as private educational institutions collaborate with instructional designers and developers in order to find the most adequate MOOC platform for their needs. Another important issue that needs to be considered is the choice of a platform which can offer a multiple and open assessment tools' system (computer-based assessment, teacher-based assessment, automated peer-peer assessment engine, automated award system) that facilitates a multi-level assessment peer-peer, student-teacher, group-group, and student-'open communities' during the whole learning progress.

4. Conclusions

Designing an efficient language learning environment for a massive number of learners is not an easy task. It needs a joint effort of instructive designers, developers and language teachers who will design, implement and evaluate different MOOLC scenarios in order to achieve this goal. Sharing good ideas, practices and examples of these initiatives is a starting point. This paper envisages to start an open discussion about MOOLCs design proposing the MOILLE questionnaire and showcasing good practices.

5. Acknowledgements

This research is an output of the LangMOOC project[3] which has been funded from support of the European Commission within the framework of the Erasmus+ program.

3. https://www.langmooc.com/

References

Andrade, A., Ehlers, U.-D., Caine, A., Carneiro, R., Conole, G., Kairamo, A., & Holmberg, C. (2011). *Beyond OER: shifting focus from resources to practices: the OPAL report*. University Duisburg-Essen. http://www.oerup.eu/fileadmin/_oerup/dokumente/Beyond_OER._Shifting_Focus_to_Open_Educational_Practices__OPAL_Report__2011.pdf

Beaven, T., Comas-Quinn, A., Hauck, M., De Los Arcos, B., & Lewis, T. (2013). The open translation MOOC: creating online communities to transcend linguistic barriers. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education, 3*(18). https://doi.org/10.5334/2013-18

Mackness, J., Mak, S., & Williams, R. (2010). The ideals and reality of participating in a MOOC. In L. Dirckinck-Holmfeld, V. Hodgson, C. Jones, M. De Laat & D. McConnell (Eds), *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Networked Learning 2010* (pp. 266-275). Lancaster: University of Lancaster. https://researchportal.port.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/the-ideals-and-reality-of-participating-in-a-mooc(067e281e-6637-423f-86a5-ff4d2d687af1).html

Perifanou, M. (2015). Research report on the current state of language learning MOOCs worldwide: exploration, classification and evaluation. *LangMOOC project*. http://www.langmooc.com/?cat=7

Perifanou, M. (2016). Worldwide state of language MOOCs . In S. Papadima-Sophocleous, L. Bradley & S. Thouësny (Eds), *CALL communities and culture – short papers from EUROCALL 2016* (pp. 386-390). Research-publishing.net. https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.eurocall2016.593

Perifanou, M., & Economides, A. (2014). MOOCs for language learning: an effort to explore and evaluate the first practices. In *Proceedings of the INTED2014 Proceedings. IATED conference held in Valencia, Spain 8-12 March 2014* (pp. 3561-3570). http://library.iated.org/view/PERIFANOU2014MOO

Perifanou, M., Holotescu, C., Andone, D., & Grosseck, G. (2014). Exploring OERs and MOOCs for learning of EU languages. *SMART Conference 2014 - Social Media in Academia: Research and Teaching, At Timisoara, Romania*. http://www.docfoc.com/exploring-oers-and-moocs-for-learning-of-eu-languages

Rubio, F. (2015). The role of interaction in MOOCs and traditional technology-enhanced language courses. In E. Dixon & M. Thomas (Eds), *Researching language learner interaction online: from social media to MOOCs*. CALICO Monograph 2015. http://calico.org/LearnerInteractionsOnline.pdf

Research-publishing.net

Published by Research-publishing.net, not-for-profit association
Dublin, Ireland; Voillans, France, info@research-publishing.net

CALL communities and culture – short papers from EUROCALL 2016
Edited by Salomi Papadima-Sophocleous, Linda Bradley, and Sylvie Thouësny

Typeset by Research-publishing.net
Cover design by © Easy Conferences, info@easyconferences.eu, www.easyconferences.eu
Cover layout by © Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)
Photo "bridge" on cover by © Andriy Markov/Shutterstock
Photo "frog" on cover by © Fany Savina (fany.savina@gmail.com)
Fonts used are licensed under a SIL Open Font License

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-43-8 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)
Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-44-5 (Ebook, PDF, colour)
ISBN13: 978-1-908416-45-2 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)

Legal deposit, Ireland: The National Library of Ireland, The Library of Trinity College, The Library of the University of Limerick, The Library of Dublin City University, The Library of NUI Cork, The Library of NUI Maynooth, The Library of University College Dublin, The Library of NUI Galway.

Legal deposit, United Kingdom: The British Library.
British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: décembre 2016.