

2 Internationalization of higher education and the use of MOOCs to improve second language proficiency: the MOVE-ME project

Donatella Troncarelli¹ and Andrea Villarini²

Abstract

Over the last few decades the international dimension of higher education has grown significantly as internationalization has become a strategic goal for many governments. Students on the move worldwide reached five million in 2015 and their number is increasing at a rate of 10% each year. Many of these students need to develop proficiency in the language of the host country rapidly, in order to carry out their studies successfully and benefit from their experience abroad, on both personal and academic levels. Technology has the potential to accommodate these needs since it can enhance the process of learning offering flexible and self-paced paths, that can complement conventional language courses and extending ways of learning and teaching second languages. This paper presents the premises and the main choices of the MOVE-ME project – Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for university students on the move in Europe –, funded under the Key Action 2 of the Erasmus+ program and based on the use of MOOCs to widen access to education resources for learning English and Italian for academic purposes.

Keywords: internationalization, language for academic purposes, informal language learning, MOOC.

1. University for Foreigners of Siena, Siena, Italy; troncarelli@unistrasi.it (author of the Introduction and Sections 1 and 2)

2. University for Foreigners of Siena, Siena, Italy; villarini@unistrasi.it (author of Section 3)

How to cite this chapter: Troncarelli, D., & Villarini, A. (2017). Internationalization of higher education and the use of MOOCs to improve second language proficiency: the MOVE-ME project. In Q. Kan & S. Bax (Eds), *Beyond the language classroom: researching MOOCs and other innovations* (pp. 5-14). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2017.mooc2016.667>

1. Introduction

In recent decades, an increasingly integrated world economy has profoundly influenced higher education. In order to respond to the demand of a more globalised world, where goods and trade cross many borders, many governments have implemented policies and programs that have rapidly internationalized universities. As a result, millions of students go abroad to spend at least part of their studies in a foreign country. The number of students who choose to study outside of their home countries has doubled since 2000, reaching almost five million students in 2015, a figure estimated by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, n.d.) to be three times larger than in 1990.

The increasing trend towards internationalization in Europe is also due in part to the efforts made by the European Commission to Internationalize higher education through the Bologna Process, which aims at harmonizing academic systems and at building a common European higher education area that can ensure compatible degree structures, transferable credits, and equal academic qualifications. Forty-eight countries inside and outside the EU have already implemented reforms in their higher education systems in order to foster intra-European student mobility, to increase employability and the attractiveness of higher education in Europe. Even though it is difficult to give precise figures of changing student mobility ascribable to the Bologna Process, because the criteria for measuring it have remained fairly weak and vary from country to country³, it is believed that the overall increase in foreign students in Europe during the first 10 years of the Bologna Process was higher than 50% overall growth of the total number of foreign students in all countries of the world (Teichler, 2012; UIS, n.d.).

This growth does not include only European students but also students coming from other continents. The rate of students studying in Europe and coming from non EU countries especially from Asia, has increased in the last 20 years.

3. The way European countries consider foreign students is heterogeneous. Some countries even include in their mobile or international student statistics students who have moved to the country before starting their university studies, while other countries count mobile students among home students during their experience in another country (Teichler, 2012).

China, India and Korea encourage students to study abroad and, at present, Asian students account for 53% of all students studying abroad worldwide (Piro, 2016). Also, the number of students coming from Africa is increasing and the demand for studying abroad is predicted to mirror general population growth.

Though the most common destination countries for mobile students are the USA, UK, Australia, France, Germany, Russia, Japan and Canada (OECD, 2016; UIS, n.d.), even countries that were less affected by steady international trends in the past, such as Ireland and Italy, are now strongly involved in the internationalization process, according to UIS. The number of international students in Ireland has risen to 8.8% of the overall student body in the academic year 2015-16, with an increase of more than 25 percent in the last 3 years. In Italy, international students were 3.9% of the overall student body in the academic year 2015-16, a figure far below the European average that reaches 8.6% (European Migration Network, 2014). The majority of mobile students in Italy come from European, Asian and African countries, such as Albania, Romania, Greece, China, Cameroon and Morocco. Except for Chinese students, for the students coming from these countries, Italy represents the preferred destination for studies within the EU (European Migration Network, 2014).

2. Internationalization in Italy

Many countries have participated in international educational activities for a long time, attracting students from abroad and providing international and cross-cultural perspectives. Italy has been one of these as it has been attracting students from North Europe since the Renaissance. The flows of students coming to Italy to study art and literature have been continuous but not considerable (De Mauro, 2002; Diadori, Palermo, & Troncarelli, 2015). Recently, this form of traditional internationalization has been strengthened by other forms of student mobility.

First of all, the Erasmus+ Project, responsible for the mobility of 250,000 in Europe, according to the European Commission data, has brought to Italy more than 20,000 students per year and has allowed 25,000 Italian students to

experience studying abroad in the academic year 2015-16. Besides being one of the top European senders and receivers of Erasmus students, Italy has also started to promote programs for the recruitment of foreign students in the last decade.

In 2006, the program ‘Invest Your Talent in Italy’ was launched with the aim of attracting postgraduate students from countries of trade interest for Italy, such as Colombia, South Africa, India, Turkey and Brazil. Two years before, the Marco Polo program had been launched to promote studying in Italy among Chinese students. The program is an agreement between Italian and Chinese governments that facilitates enrolment in Italian Universities and in obtaining a student visa. To promote further studying in Italy among Chinese young people, the Turandot program was launched in 2009. The program focuses on arts, music, and design, allowing students to enrol in Italian Institutes of High Training in Art and Music. Therefore, the number of Chinese students in the Italian higher education system has increased by 222% in five years since 2009, thanks to both programs⁴.

The growth of international students in Italy is also related to the promotion of joint programs and double degrees with overseas universities. Recently, this has become a successful activity in increasing internationalization in Italy.

3. International students’ language needs

Language plays an important role for international students in choosing their destination country. It is not an accident that English language countries such as the USA, UK, Australia and Canada are among the top destinations (UIS, n.d.). Italy, because of its long tradition as a destination for students coming from North Europe to study literature and arts, as mentioned above, offers a limited choice of degree courses in English. In the majority of the courses, Italian is the medium of instruction. This language policy choice, in line with the plurilingual approach of the Council of Europe that safeguards linguistic diversity, can

4. The source of these data is Uni-Italia, an association for international education supported by the Italian Ministry of Education and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs: <http://www.uni-italia.it/it/>

represent either a means of attraction or an obstacle. Many students choose to come to Italy because of its language and culture. Nevertheless, the language proficiency level required is not adequate to cope with studying in Italy⁵.

As the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) points out, language proficiency has not only a vertical dimension described by the communicative level achieved, but also a horizontal dimension related to parameters of the tasks and communicative activities that take place in the domain in which the use of the language is involved. In other words, a language certification level B1 or B2 certifies the student as an independent and confident user of the language in many common everyday situations, but it does not guarantee that the student can master the language needed for studying in a foreign language.

Consequently, international students should be supported in developing language and academic skills for successful university studies across disciplines. However, at present, the courses open to international and Erasmus students in Italy are designed to develop only some of those skills because they are more oriented to develop the vertical dimension of the communicative competence, rather than enlarging knowledge and skills related to the specific tasks students are required to accomplish in the educational domain and within a particular field of knowledge. Thus, most of the time students have to endure by themselves the burden of mastering linguistic structures, lexicon, and discourse structures in order to understand lectures and texts, as well as learning how to express their ideas in the most appropriate style for their purpose and audience.

Moreover, students need to consolidate, extend and develop their proficiency in academic Italian in a short time, without leaving aside the curriculum subjects. Courses based on intensive tuition or weekly classes are not effective because students have little time to dedicate to language learning and their attendance

5. Chinese students are required to achieve CEFR B1 for studying at degree level or above. Language requirements are less demanding for them than those for other international students who have to demonstrate having a B2 level of language proficiency to enrol for a Bachelor's or Master's degree. Erasmus students can experience studying in Italy even with a language proficiency under the B1 level.

becomes very irregular. Therefore, new learning solutions have to be found out and technologies can be the key for new opportunities and self-paced learning.

4. Teaching language using MOOCs: the MOVE-ME project

One of the new learning solutions is to provide courses in the form of MOOCs, which allow very large numbers of learners to study at any time and in any place free of charge. Furthermore, a language MOOC enables students in international mobility to increase their proficiency in the language used to deliver the university courses they are going to attend, even before they leave at no extra cost.

However, as known, MOOCs are usually courses with very large numbers of enrolled students, numbers that are generally considered not suitable for language training. Consequently, the risk could be to provide a course without any chance of success (because it would be attended simultaneously by too large a number of students). In other words, it is to take on a new difficult challenge; namely the one about creating a course that can be successfully attended by hundreds of students, and at the same time can actually provide language training for academic purposes.

To take on the above challenge and with the landscape outlined in previous sections, the MOVE-ME project has been devised. The project aims at creating two MOOCs teaching English and Italian for academic purposes, designed for students who want to study in Italian and English universities. This project is founded by the Erasmus+ program Key Action 2 – Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices – and it involves six partners:

- University for Foreigners of Siena, Italy;
- University of Galway, Ireland;
- The Open University, UK;

- Federazione Nazionale Insegnanti, Italy;
- Computer Technology Institute and Press ‘Diophantus’, Greece;
- Institutul de Științe ale Educației, Romania.

This project is led by the University for Foreigners of Siena that has in recent years gained a rich experience in the field of language training and the use of new technologies. It is one of the two public Italian universities specializing in the teaching of Italian as a second language. In the last ten years, the University for Foreigners of Siena has worked out several projects based on the use of technologies to meet specific learning needs and to experience new pedagogical solutions for distance language learning, some of which were rewarded with the European Language Label⁶. Among the last experiences, there is the first MOOC for learning Italian created by an Italian institution named ‘Introduction to Italian’, an open course for beginners, hosted by FutureLearn (www.futurelearn.com/courses/learn-italian), which involved more than 48,000 learners in its first run.

The interest of the University for Foreigners of Siena in developing language courses for academic purposes, originates not only from the inclusion of these types of training in its educational syllabus, but also from the strong demand of academic Italian, both in general and within this institution. The internationalization rate at University for Foreigners of Siena reached 13% in the academic year 2015-16, a figure far beyond the national and European rates (UNISTRASI data⁷). Therefore, to support students in developing skills in academic Italian is a crucial matter for successful study at university and for increasing internationalization. Moreover, the University for Foreigners of Siena, as far as Italian language learning is concerned, caters to the needs of other universities in the same area and in other Italian regions.

6. The European Language Label is an award of the European Commission given annually to innovative language learning projects involving new techniques in language teaching and spreading the knowledge of languages' existence, thereby promoting good practice: http://ec.europa.eu/education/initiatives/language-label_en

7. http://www.unistrasi.it/1/558/2752/Area_dati.htm

Thus, the MOVE-ME project was devised to meet this demand and to give an appropriate answer to the specific learning needs of students on the move. Therefore, it aims at developing learning paths specifically for students in European ‘mobility’ programs and intends to develop language fluency for communication in academic contexts. The learning paths will be implemented as a MOOC on the FutureLearn platform, in order to make them accessible to the largest number of students on the move. Learning materials are designed for self-study and will be produced in two languages, English and Italian. As mentioned on Kan’s profile⁸, the two MOOCs will support learners in the acquisition of competences and skills necessary for understanding and producing oral and written expository texts relating to specific disciplines. In particular, the project aims to:

- increase students’ awareness of the language learning process and knowing how to use effective learning strategies;
- increase students’ understanding of written and oral expository texts relating to academic disciplines;
- improve the quality of oral and written expository texts produced by students and relating to academic disciplines;
- improve students’ performance at oral and written exams in L2;
- support students in learning to learn;
- provide guidelines and a syllabus for the creation of MOOCs for languages for academic purposes;
- provide specific guidelines for the evaluation of language MOOCs;

8. <http://wels.open.ac.uk/people/qk8?>

- create Open Educational Resources (OERs) which support autonomous and independent learning;
- develop a website hosting all OERs created during the project.

The choice to develop the learning materials in English and Italian is due to the availability of a wide literature on academic English that allows the project team to have a theoretical framework for rethinking learning paths from the perspective of open online learning. The rich literature on academic English also offers many cues for teaching a less wide spread second language such as Italian.

The two MOOCs for both languages include six modules that will last six weeks. The first one outlines the main features of academic discourse and texts and raises awareness about learning how to learn a second language for academic purposes. The second one deals with reading comprehension, while the third one focuses on listening comprehension. The following ones are dedicated to production and will guide students to write an essay, and to prepare and deliver an oral presentation.

Together with the MOOCs, as mentioned in the list of the project's aims above, the MOVE-ME project will create a repository of open educational resources to be used by teachers and learners, that will be hosted on the project's website (www.movemeproject.eu). Teachers can use it to develop their own second language teaching paths, and learners can use it to improve specific aspects of their competence in English or in Italian for academic purposes.

5. Conclusion

The choice to use a MOOC to support students' mobility is linked to the flexibility of this educational pattern (Bárcena & Martín-Monje, 2014). MOOCs, as online courses, can be followed by students who are going to leave their country to study abroad or by students already studying in another country. Moreover, MOOCs are free courses that can be used by those who cannot afford to attend face-to-

face courses. Another reason that encouraged delivering the courses on a MOOC platform was the interest in verifying the effectiveness of its methodology with this profile of students.

Even though the advantages of using MOOCs for teaching a second language for academic purposes to university students are many, a couple of questions still require an answer. The first one is related with the effectiveness of MOOCs as a means to teach a second language, and the second one is the possibility and the opportunity of using MOOC technology and methodology for curricular activities. The MOVE-ME project aims to address these questions directly.

References

- Bárcena, E., & Martín-Monje E. (Eds). (2014). *Language MOOCs: providing learning, transcending boundaries*. De Gruyter Open.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: learning teaching assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Mauro, T. (2002). *Italiano 2000: i pubblici e le motivazioni dell'italiano diffuso fra stranieri*. Roma: Bulzoni.
- Diadori, P., Palermo, M., & Troncarelli, D. (2015). *Insegnare l'italiano come seconda lingua*. Roma: Carocci.
- European Migration Network. (2014). *Immigration of international students to Italy*. Roma. Edizioni IDOS. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/immigration-students/14a._italy_national_report_international_students_april2013_final_en.pdf
- OECD. (2016). *Education at a glance 2016: OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Piro, J. M. (2016). *Revolutionizing global higher education policy: innovation and the Bologna process*. New York: Routledge.
- Teichler, U. (2012). International student mobility and the Bologna process. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 7(1), 34-49. <https://doi.org/10.2304/rcie.2012.7.1.34>
- UIS. (n.d.). *UNESCO institute for statistics*. <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>



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

© 2017 by Editors (collective work)
© 2017 by Authors (individual work)

Beyond the language classroom: researching MOOCs and other innovations
Edited by Kan Qian and Stephen Bax

Rights: This volume is published under the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives International (CC BY-NC-ND) licence; **individual articles may have a different licence.** Under the CC BY-NC-ND licence, the volume is freely available online (<https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2017.mooc2016.9781908416537>) for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.

Disclaimer: Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it was not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this book are believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the editorial team, nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While Research-publishing.net is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

Trademark notice: product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Copyrighted material: every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this book. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this book.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net
Cover design and cover photos by © Raphaël Savina (raphael@savina.net)

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-52-0 (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: 978-1-908416-53-7 (Ebook, PDF, colour)
ISBN13: 978-1-908416-54-4 (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: juin 2017.
