

Language MOOCs and OERs: new trends and challenges

A cura di
Giampiero De Cristofaro
Fátima Silva, Borbála Samu



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1. Preface

Borbála Samu, Fátima Silva, Giampiero De Cristofaro

During the past 10 years since the publication of the volume *Language MOOCs. Providing Learning, Transcending Boundaries* by Martín-Monje and Bárcena (2014), language Massive Open Online Courses (LMOOCs) have seen an exponential growth worldwide, with a boost in growth rates associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. The year 2020 has recently been referred to as “the second year of MOOCs” (Shah, 2020). While MOOCs have failed to significantly ‘disrupt’ higher education (Jordan & Goshtasbpour, 2022), they have certainly added some diversity to it. Online education represents one of the most widespread means of development of education and a much wider range of higher education institutions now offer some kind of distance education through MOOCs than did previously. Globalization and technological development allow to an ever-increasing number of students to access knowledge freely, through online courses and resources. Open learning has progressively gained place in higher education, introducing new models of flexible tools linked to long-distance education. In addition, free access to MOOCs and Open Educational Resources (OERs) for non-students allows the dissemination of higher education to wider audiences (Third Mission).

This volume presents LMOOCs from a wide array of perspectives, framing them with respect to OERs and new available technologies. The topics addressed by the 25 chapters are divided into 4 parts. The first deals with LMOOC design and analysis, presenting state-of-the-art practices and methodological approaches. The second presents skills and competences addressed by MOOCs, such as oral skills, diaphasic skills, competencies needed to learn and use languages for specific purposes and literary language. The third part shows various examples of how skills and competences can be developed thanks to digital resources and technologies other than MOOCs and offers some theoretical approaches, such as the systematic comparison of two languages or the application of a grammatical framework, to increase their effectiveness. The fourth part opens to diverse problems and proposals regarding technologies in language teaching, including games and Artificial Intelligence. The authors of the chapters are higher education professionals, applied linguists, and language technologists working on issues related to language learning and teaching, namely: MOOCs, OERs, new approaches in

language teaching and learning, academic mobility, linguistic description of languages, linguistic diversity, language for specific purposes, digital transformation in education and new educational technologies.

In Part I, Chapter 1 focuses on the designing process of the two LMOOCs (*Italiano accademico per studenti slavofoni*, *Português Académico para estudantes de língua eslava*) created within the LMOOC4Slav project. The chapter describes the procedure that led to the creation of the courses, starting from the literary review on acquisition of Italian and Portuguese by Slavic speakers and a large survey documenting linguistic and intercultural difficulties perceived and/or faced by Slavic learners wishing to or already studying in Italy and in Portugal. Chapter 2 analyses critically the MOOC *Português Académico para estudantes de língua eslava*, facing issues such as human peer-to-peer interaction, plurilingualism and technical language. Chapter 3 describes the creation of the first language MOOC for teaching Italian language and culture (*Introduction to Italian*), created by the University for Foreigners of Siena. The chapter illustrates the main conceptual, methodological and applicative choices made, identifies two main critical issues and advances some proposals to face them. Chapter 4 offers an analysis of the first edition of the MOOC *Introduction to Italian* on the platform FutureLearn (2016), focalizing on communicative interactions inside the course. Chapter 5 introduces the design, the delivery and the evaluation of an English LMOOC that inspired the design framework of several online language courses hosted by Federica Web Learning, a leading platform in Europe for open access multimedia education.

Chapter 6 opens Part II, discussing about how to develop both affective ties with the target language and communicative competence within an LMOOC. Chapter 7 concentrates on the development of oral skills in a LMOOC, examining if it offers a viable solution for developing not only receptive, but also productive skills. Chapter 8 highlights the importance of prosody in foreign language teaching and shows an example of how to monitor and assess prosodic competence efficiently. Chapter 9 presents a good practice of developing diaphasic competence in Italian through a MOOC of University of Bologna dedicated to the enhancement of comprehension and production of written texts. Chapter 10 shows two examples of MOOCs, the first combining CLIL and technology, the second including, in addition, a special attention to linguistic diversity and multilingualism, offered to teachers of non-linguistic disciplines and foreign languages from all over the world. Chapter 11 considers the usage of MOOCs for developing translation skills, based on the analysis of a learner corpus driving students' translations of literary texts.

Part III integrates 9 chapters. Chapter 12 discusses the evolution of Italian language teaching with technology, meeting diverse learner needs, empha-

sizing specialized skills for professional and academic contexts, and proposing a didactic unit within the LMOOC4Slav project to enhance advanced language skills and comprehension of bureaucratic Italian structures. Chapter 13 presents an experimental specialized Italian L2 course of the University of Bologna for medical students, expanded to broader medical fields, integrating OERs and Open Educational Practices (OEPs) to address pedagogical and content challenges. Chapter 14 explores teaching idiomatic expressions to Macedonian speakers, with a test administered to university students to analyse the effectiveness of integrating idiomatic expressions in the early stages of Italian language learning. Chapter 15 investigates Italian learners' metacognitive development in request situations via a two-phase study, aiming to grasp their pragmatic awareness at B1 and B2 levels, influenced by social dynamics. Chapter 16 presents insights from a pilot study to understand learners' perceptions of communication appropriateness and proposes technology-mediated learning paths to facilitate socio-cultural adaptation during study abroad experiences. Chapter 17 offers a didactic approach for Italian as a Second Language classroom, integrating literary themes with contemporary topics through authentic materials online to enhance argumentative skills and foster linguistic autonomy. Chapter 18 investigates how OERs used in language education promote the development of critical digital literacy and life skills among university learners. Chapter 19 analyses common errors in written Italian produced by Serbophone students, aiming to inform the development of digital teaching materials for error correction and potentially create an application tailored to address these errors. Chapter 20 proposes PV Grammar as a framework derived from a theory of the relationship between speakers, their environment, and mental representations, which can serve as a pedagogical tool for language educators and course designers.

Finally, in Part IV, chapter 21 focuses on asynchronous tools in teaching Portuguese as a non-native language, providing strategies to overcome challenges and leveraging technology for future educational opportunities. Chapter 22 examines the effectiveness of gamified Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) in intensifying engagement during Italian language learning at the University for Foreigners of Perugia, using two game-based learning platforms and conducting an experimental evaluation through a questionnaire. Chapter 23 presents three case studies that underscore how serious games enhance language learning across varying student abilities. Chapter 24 explores the potential of chatbots and intelligent tutors, driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI), in improving language learning experiences within online courses while also addressing potential challenges and proposing strategies for optimization. Chapter 25 outlines the creation of an open badge system, specifically micro badges within the Erasmus+ project

DIAL4U, to validate informal language learning, emphasizing recognition of foreign language acquisition, evaluation methods, and future implications.

The 25 chapters are a selection of contributions presented at two international conferences organised within the project “Romance languages for Slavic-speaking university students” (LMOOC4SLAV), funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. The partnership, led by the University for Foreigners of Perugia (Italy), includes the University of Porto (Portugal), the University of Masaryk (Czech Republic), the Jagiellonian University (Poland), the SS. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (North Macedonia), and the FENICE - National Federation of Teachers Centre of Initiative for Europe (Italy). In order to promote the academic success of mobility students, having as its target audience, although not exclusively, Slavic-speaking students learning Romance languages, specifically Italian and Portuguese, the LMOOC4SLAV project has created 2 MOOCs, one for Italian and one for Portuguese. The MOOCs are freely available on EduOpen, an Italian MOOC provider. The project is also intended as a support to Italian and Portuguese language teachers in Slavic-speaking countries, as it provides a repertoire of Open Educational Resources.

The first conference was held in Porto the 7th and the 8th of October 2022, and the second one a year later in Naples, the 28th and the 29th of September 2023. The languages of the conference were English, Italian and Portuguese and the selected contributions reflect this multilingual choice. The aim of the volume is to offer an up-to-date picture about new technological and methodological solutions and accessible online resources to enhance language learning and teaching.

One final expression of gratitude is extended to the authors and reviewers whose contributions, across the various stages culminating in this publication, have made its realization possible.

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