DESIGNING AN EXPERIMENTAL LMOOC: STRUCTURED FLEXIBILITY IN AN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES B2 LEVEL COURSE

Abstract

Language MOOCs (LMOOCs) are an emerging format (Barcena & Martin-Monje, 2014; Godwin-Jones, 2014) among a rapidly growing number of cMOOCs (connectivist or network based) and xMOOCs (extended courses designed to be similar to traditional courses), as defined by Downes (2012). Because of the nature of second language learning, which benefits, in particular, from practice, engagement, active participation in building and exploring learning strategies, autonomous learning, self and peer assessment, collaboration, interaction, skill-based content as well as the support of a facilitator, researchers have put forth the importance of providing an adaptive learning system which combines the philosophy behind the xMOOC style format and that of cMOOCs in order to enhance the effectiveness of LMOOCs (Godwin-Jones, 2014; Perifanou, 2016; Sokolik, 2014).

Within this scenario, a team of three Italian universities (University of Calabria, University of Naples "L'Orientale", University of Palermo) embarked on a joint project, "Corsi MOOCs: per un percorso sperimentale di didattica delle lingue straniere moderne", to create innovative online didactic activities for learners of English, French, and German. The courses are aimed primarily at university students, but are also of interest to other parties who wish to improve their language competences, be it for professional, academic or personal reasons. Indeed, the Italian university system, and University Language Centres in particular, strongly support the mission of lifelong learning.

Specifically, this presentation will focus on the English MOOC, which aims at enhancing academic language skills through learner-centered interactive language activities as well as follow-up activities to be carried out beyond the course platform. During this talk, we will present an overview of the didactic materials created, which are currently being used as an integration to online synchronous language courses with limited numbers of students, but which will be integrated so as to become a full-fledged LMOOC. The particularity of the course is that it allows learners to choose their own learning path, by focusing and expanding on the skills that they are interested in, hence offering the advantages of a structured language course while allowing a great deal of flexibility and catering to individual differences and needs.

Moreover, we will share the results of the pilot studies carried out among teacher trainers and graduate students enrolled at the University of Calabria and discuss the challenges and opportunities met as well as the improvements that can be introduced. In particular, further efforts will need to be made to allow for more ways for learners to connect and collaborate with each other, encouraging them to engage in each other's work by sharing their tasks and becoming more involved in peer assessment, as well as to develop their own reflective learning spaces. These features, indeed, will pave the way to a future organization of a stand-alone course or as an integration of a face to face course by offering extra online learning materials recommended within the course asset.