Chapter 73
The Structural and Dialogic Aspects of Language Massive Open Online Courses (LMOOCs):
A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This case study contributes to the growing body of research on Language Massive Open Online Courses (LMOOCs) by examining their structural aspects (i.e., layout and format) and dialogic nature (i.e., interaction and negotiation) from the language learner's perspective. This exploratory study draws on data from 15 student teachers of English as a Second/Foreign Language at a private graduate institution on the East Coast of the U.S. As required by their technology elective, participants who were enrolled in a beginner-level LMOOC of their choice kept a log of their learning process/progress over a period of eight weeks. At the end of the course, they were invited to fill out a post-project questionnaire to reflect on their overall experience. The goal of the project was to educate student teachers on the pedagogical underpinnings of LMOOCs while exposing them to online language learning. In this study, the focus was primarily on self-reported system interaction and profile data since the Author was not involved in the design of any of the LMOOCs. Data collection instruments included a needs analysis, weekly LMOOC logs, and a post-LMOOC questionnaire. According to the questionnaire results, student-teachers' motivation was "satisfactory," and only four out of 15 student teachers completed their LMOOCs. Results further showed that structural aspects (i.e., content, materials, and procedures) rank higher than dialogic aspects (i.e., scaffolding and feedback). This questions the over-reliance on content transmission and instructivist (or teacher-instruction) approaches in LMOOCs, especially since MOOCs enrolment numbers rely heavily on learner's self-motivation to sign up and complete a course.

BACKGROUND

Massive open online courses (or MOOCs) are an offspring of open educational resources (OERs). OERs, such as the OER Commons (https://www.oercommons.org/), offer an abundance of freely accessible learning, teaching, and testing materials for learners and teachers. MOOCs, on the other hand, are free online courses developed by start-ups or universities for anyone with Internet access. Popular providers include Coursera, edX, Khan Academy, and Udemy. Language massive open online courses (or LMOOCs) have also been developed by a number of universities (e.g., University of Pennsylvania and Carnegie Mellon University).

While MOOCs have been around since 2008, their coverage in public media had decreased by almost 50% by mid- 2014 from the peak of their media popularity in 2013 (Kovanović, Joksimović, Gašević, Siemens, & Hatala, 2015); nevertheless, language education research has recently become increasingly interested in language massive open online courses or "LMOOCs" (see edited volumes by Bárcena & Martín-Monje, 2014 and Dixon & Thomas, 2015). This is due to the potential of LMOOCs in providing more learners with free access to language education and with increasing opportunities for interactions among other learners and speakers of the target language (with the latter being the subject of communicative language teaching). By the same token, the nature of existing LMOOCs and their potential for language learning have remained underexplored. This study thus aims to advance our understanding of the structural aspects (i.e., layout and format) and dialogic nature (i.e., interaction and negotiation) of LMOOCs from the language student-teachers' perspective. More specifically, this exploratory case study investigates how language student-teachers (STs) at a private graduate school in the U.S. experienced beginner-level language MOOCs. 15 STs of English as a Second/Foreign language tracked their learning process/progress in weekly LMOOC logs as part of their spring 2015 technology elective's requirement. In this study, the focus was primarily on self-reported system interaction and profile data, since the Author was not involved in the LMOOCs' designs. Data collection instruments included a needs analysis, weekly MOOC logs, and a post-LMOOC questionnaire. The study draws on the structure and dialogue components of the transactional distance model (see Shearer, Gregg, Joo, & Graham, 2014). The structure of the course encompassed course design elements such as learning objectives, activities, assignments, and assessments. The dialogue aspects of the course refer to the meaningful interactions between teachers and learners, or among learners themselves in the distance educational context. While MOOCs can be approached from the transactional distance model in a general sense, the "massive" and "open" factors may change the dynamics of participant interactions and can also have an impact on learning outcomes (Shearer, Gregg, Joo, & Graham, 2014).

The next section will briefly review the first MOOCs, the difference between cMOOCs and xMOOCs, and prior studies on student MOOC enrollments and attrition, and their related challenges.

MOOC Types

cMOOCs vs. xMOOCs

It is important to highlight the traditional distinctions between cMOOCs and xMOOCs because of their different structural set-ups, and the interactions these differences afford language learning and teaching. Connectivist MOOCs (the "c" in cMOOC) have been considered as distributed networks in the sense that they do not run on a single website or with a centralized core of content; the content in cMOOCs is

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