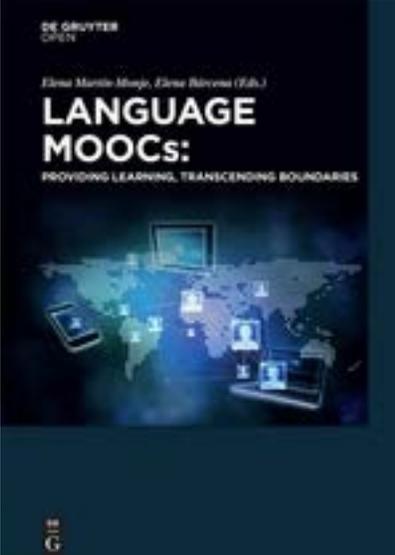


REVIEW OF *LANGUAGE MOOCs: PROVIDING LEARNING, TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES*

<p>Language MOOCs: Providing Learning, Transcending Boundaries</p> <p>Elena Martín Monje and Elena Bárcena Madera</p> <p>2014</p> <p>ISBN: 978-3-11-042250-4</p> <p>e-ISBN: 978-3-11-042006-7</p> <p>Open access</p> <p>300 pp.</p> <p>De Gruyter</p> <p>Warsaw/Berlin</p>	
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Review by **Gabriel Guillén, Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey**

The reading of *Language MOOCs: Providing Learning, Transcending Boundaries*, edited by Elena Martín Monje and Elena Bárcena, leaves one inspired to design a revolutionary, informed, and aesthetically attractive Language Massive Open Online Course (LMOOC), more than to research about this subject. And this is precisely the most desirable outcome, as Colpaert provocatively concluded in the last chapter: “I have the impression that this emergence of MOOCs has also more to do with people speaking about them, and creating expectations, than people actually designing and developing them” (p. 171).

The book is fully accessible online and contains an assortment of guidelines for designing successful LMOOCs; empirical evidence; and discussions about outcomes, participant profiles, motivation, instructors’ roles, accessibility/usability, and ethical/aesthetical considerations. An LMOOC philosophy emerges from the amalgam of articles, in spite of the heterogeneity of themes and perspectives. Six researchers are from Spain (including the two editors of the volume), three are from the United Kingdom, two are from the US, and the remaining three researchers are from Belgium, France, and Portugal.

The main challenge for LMOOCs is clearly stated in the introduction (Chapter 1) by Bárcena and Martín-Monje. Language learning is viewed as *skill-based*, more than as *knowledge-based*, and LMOOCs require proactive, engaged, flexible, and autonomous learners. Ideally, an LMOOC should function as a connectivist MOOC (cMOOC), the original MOOC, which was built on the interaction of participants and the creation of knowledge as part of a decentralized learning network.

Language MOOCs provides information about general and specific issues such as the need for preparing participants for the MOOC learning experience during the first week of classes, the creation of subsequent modules that are independent from each other and scalable, the critical role of volunteers, the importance of forums and videos for explicit knowledge and input, and the connection between MOOCs and the Open Educational Resources (OERs) movement. Finally, they discuss the paradox of LMOOCs, in that they are designed to offer open access to language learning, but most learners who take them are well-educated and employed. In fact, most of the examples in the book correspond to the xMOOC model, which entails teacher-centered massive courses based on the traditional university curriculum. Several

authors propose a hybrid format (xMOOC and cMOOC), using a familiar learning structure (platform), together with social media and peer feedback tools.

In Chapter 2, Sokolik describes the instructor presence as essential in order to create community. She views MOOCs as an opportunity to transform the language pedagogy by maximizing engagement and interaction, facilitating self-organized learning, providing videos for engagement, and matching the goals with assessment and course content.

Moreira Teixeira and Mota propose a design for collaborative LMOOCs based on the IMOOC model (Open University of Portugal) in Chapter 3. A number of simple principles inspire this model: open courses, free resources, learner-centeredness, and a robust platform. They describe how learning happens mostly through networks, through the use of Personal Learning Environments (PLEs) for artifact exchange and for conversations with other participants (creating communities of practice in the case of LMOOCs).

Beaven, Codreanu and Creuzé report on an innovative experiment on motivation in an LMOOC (Chapter 4) and show that participants tend to be intrinsically motivated, self-determined, and well-educated in this environment. Learners in their study reported that the course became more useful as they progressed further through it. Finally, the authors of this chapter advocate for an instructional design model that can accelerate and improve the iteration of LMOOCs.

Castrillo de Larreta-Azelain describes the competences of the LMOOC instructor in Chapter 5. Before the course, teachers have different roles such as structure designers, content experts, and evaluators. They have to create modules for a total of 6-12 weeks, estimate the hours of study for each module (4-8 hours of weekly work), sequence and create content (including videos), create self- and peer-assessment tools, produce precise rubrics—although the example given in Table 5.2. (p. 78) does not seem to be very specific—, and provide feedback for both correct and incorrect answers. Instructors also design the use of communication tools, namely mass mailing, blogs, wikis, online forums, webconferences, and chats—despite the fact that the author does not recommend using synchronous tools.

During the LMOOC, teachers become curators, facilitators, leaders and administrators, solving issues, suggesting materials, moderating forums, motivating students, and overseeing the whole learning experience. Finally, before, during, and after the MOOC, instructors are researchers, collecting and analyzing learners' data. As inferable, different instructors and teacher assistants could and should perform different tasks within this framework.

Chapter 6 focuses on a specific aspect of design: the architectonics of a LMOOC. The author, Read, returns to the idea of creating a hybrid model of cMOOC (social media) and xMOOC features (the platform), using a spiral metaphor: learners will go from the MOOC to the social media, seeking authentic input and interacting with target language speakers who are not necessarily part of the course, and then they come back to the platform to talk about their findings. Within this framework, the structure of an xMOOC helps offset some of the limitations of social media for second language learning. However, the overwhelming abundance of resources available online does not guarantee autonomy and proficiency development.

In Chapter 7, Rodrigo focuses on accessibility and the inclusion of external spaces in the LMOOC syllabus. Locutions, subtitles, audio-descriptions, common font types and sizes, downloadable files, clear naming of files and modules, and specific information about type of task and time on task are only a few examples of the accessibility aspects that designers need to add or take into account. In terms of videolectures, areas to consider for accessibility include numbering, titles, length, marking watched videos, and creating shortcuts. All documents need to be searchable (converting scanned images to text), to contain labels, to remain easy to follow, to offer descriptions for images, links and forms, and to provide information about the language of the document. In sum, Rodrigo suggests that LMOOC creators

need to create learning experiences that are not only accessible but also usable and receptive to personalization.

Chapter 8 deals with the ethics and aesthetics of LMOOCs. In this section, Inma Álvarez explains how LMOOCs could change the horizon for the language learning agenda in terms of openness, intercultural competence (inclusion, equality, and diversity), and aesthetic awareness. The beauty of LMOOCs does not derive only from the access to language learning as an instrument of socioeconomic promotion, but also from the non-instrumental and personal experience of learning a language, which can be seen as an end in itself. Álvarez argues in favor of language programs (i.e. LMOOCs) that focus on cultural transformations (knowing others and knowing ourselves) and in support of “an education that makes them [learners] aware of how language choices reveal moral and aesthetic perspectives, or how successful social interaction with others depends on their behavior” (pp. 130–131).

Chapter 9 by Rubio contains a relevant and optimistic study that contrasts the comprehensibility gains of learners who were enrolled in a Spanish pronunciation LMOOC (six weeks) with students who were participating in a face-to-face course (15 weeks). Both groups showed significant improvement, and the LMOOC had higher effect sizes after the treatment. Learners were able to progress in terms of pronunciation with no face-to-face feedback interaction and a large enrollment. This is the only experiment with a control group and a thorough reflection on feedback from an empirical perspective in this book. Effective feedback in the context of this LMOOC implied telling students how they are performing, how they should perform, and what they need to do in order to improve. As seen with the earlier study on motivation in this collection, the most successful students were those who completed all of the assignments. They also viewed their feedback more frequently, but they did not differ in regards to accessing theoretical explanations and pronunciation model from native speakers.

In the last chapter, Colpaert challenges the definition of LMOOCs and the apparent disconnect with the literature in this field. This author proposes the use of what he calls *education engineering* as an instructional model for LMOOCs and suggests a path for LMOOCs. The hypothesis is divided into four requirements for LMOOCs: modularity, specialization, adaptation, and co-construction. *Modularity* implies creating Open Educational Resources (OERs) units that are independent from each other and that could be easily exported and imported between courses and contexts. *Specialization* seeks the creation of courses that meet concrete goals, rather than simply serve large groups of students and have generic titles. The third requirement, *adaptation*, involves the use of learner analytics (beyond personal intuitions), accessibility assessment, and personalization in terms of tasks, feedback, content, and learning styles. Finally, *co-construction* considers LMOOCs as sequels to the OER movement, allowing instructors and learners to share content and leading to “50% less work and 200% more results for language teachers” (p. 169).

Colapert’s four premises for LMOOCs fit seamlessly with the most salient mantra of this compilation of articles: merging the affordances of cMOOCs and xMOOCs into an original space for healthy and boundless learning. Professionals should welcome this volume and start thinking about their next contribution to this arena if they are interested in the critical role of language learning for human development.

One could challenge the format, an academic book, which does not invite the co-creation of knowledge around the topic beyond the traditional academic correspondence: responses, citations, and reviews. A book setup also paves the way for the obsolescence of its content, particularly in the case of articles with technical information (i.e. Chapter 7, on accessibility). Nonetheless, this pioneering compilation of articles delivers on all counts. It would not be a surprise if this volume becomes a milestone for the emerging field of LMOOCs, given that it is “the first book on LMOOCs” (p. 7), published before the CALICO Vol. 13 *Researching Language Learner Interactions Online: From Social Media to MOOCs* (2015).

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