

MOOCS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING: A STUDY ON CALL FROM THE CONNECTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

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- **ABSTRACT:** The increasing offer of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) in the World Wide Web generated the need to investigate their dynamics, pedagogy and structure in more depth to judge the possibilities of their effective use in the teaching of foreign languages. In this study, based on investigations in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), we start from the perspective of the Connectivist Learning Theory, established, mainly, from the studies of Siemens and Downes to analyze two foreign language courses in the MOOC modality offered in two different digital platforms: one course in Spanish as a foreign language offered by UNED on its own platform and a Mandarin course for Spanish speakers from the UNIMOOC platform. In both cases, it is evident that the courses did not fulfill what they promised, especially regarding the need to create spaces conducive to interaction. This study is part of a broader research proposal, whose objective is to establish adequate criteria for the creation of MOOCs as tools for the teaching of foreign languages.
- **KEYWORDS:** Second language teaching. CALL. MOOCs. Connectivism.

Introduction

In mid-2013, Brazil's largest circulation newspapers announced that the University of São Paulo (USP) had begun offering its first MOOC courses, an acronym for the Massive Online Open Course. Some communication vehicles, including Folha de São Paulo¹, reported that they would be the first courses in Latin America, although the National University of Mexico had already signed a contract for this purpose with the Coursera platform since February of that year, with courses on *Scientific Thinking*, *ICT in Education* and *How to Be More Creative*. Even in Brazil, other experiences had already been developed as early as 2012. Unesp had launched the Unesp Open platform,

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¹ Available in: <<http://educacao.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,usp-lanca-primeiro-curso-virtual-gratuito-de-nivel-superior-da-america-latina,1041146>>.

providing content of its courses in digital media, while PUC-SP, in partnership with the Brazilian Association of Distance Education (ABED), launched the MOOC DL course, coordinated by Professor João Mattar. The only restriction of these initiatives is that they did not offer certificates to the participants, an aspect that USP has effectively innovated.

Thus, although it was not the first to offer MOOCs, in fact, USP started two courses certified in 2013: *Basic Physics* and *Probability and Statistics*. The problem, and misconception, as concerns media was to announce them as the first undergraduate courses in this format in Brazil. Although offered by an institution of higher education, the two courses had an extra-mural character.

The novelty celebrated by the mass media, in fact, was already known to many Brazilians with digital technologies and invariably thirsty for innovations, who already participated in courses in the MOOC format offered by universities in the United States and Europe. The MOOCs, as we will see below, have a History that begins at the dawn of the 21st century, with the Connectivist studies of Siemens and Downes, who in 2003 already theorized about them.

In 2008, the first course in this format was offered. In 2011, from a Stanford University initiative, the Coursera platform was born, completely focused on this technology, soon followed by the edX platform, daughter of a partnership between the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University. Since then, universities around the world have embraced the initiative. The Coursera platform, for example, now has partnerships with universities in South Africa, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Belgium, Canada, Chile, China, Singapore, Colombia, South Korea, Denmark, Spain, the United States, France, Holland, India Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, United Kingdom, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan and Turkey.

As we can see, MOOC platforms have advanced inexorably in a relatively brief period of time, and the trend is to further expand over the next few years. There are, however, issues about the format. An emblematic example is the interview given by Sebastian Thrun, a Stanford University professor and visionary creator of the Udacity MOOC platform, to journalist Max Chafkin in 2013, just a year after the *New York Times* had published a headline claiming 2012 to be the year of the MOOCs (PAPPANO, 2012). Among other things, Thrun stated: “I’d aspired to give people a profound education, to teach them something substantial, but the data was at odds with this idea.” (CHAFKIN, 2013).

Another authority on the subject, Professor García Aretio, linked to the UNED (National University of Distance Education of Spain) and Director of the Unesco Chair for Distance Education, published an article in 2015 where he raised around 90 doubts about MOOCs, questioning its mechanisms, pedagogy and efficiency. The researcher himself, however, tried to answer many of these questions in a new article published in 2017 entitled *Los MOOC están muy vivos*, which already gives an idea of the content of the text. Other aspects, however, remain open, including problems of interaction and feedback, which are crucial when it comes to teaching and learning foreign languages in this modality.

This paper aims to discuss some of those issues. This is a preliminary analysis about two language courses offered by different institutions on different platforms, complemented by some data considered relevant in ten other courses that touch on the theme, either because they deal with cultural aspects linked to a foreign language, or because they discuss computer-mediated teaching.

This study is part of a larger project that links researchers from the Federal University of Santa Maria, the Federal University of the Southern Frontier and the Catholic University of Pelotas in search of the best criteria for the development of courses of this type. The final objective of the project is to develop a MOOC course that discusses exactly what a MOOC should be like when geared for language teaching, defined as Language MOOC (MARTÍN-MONJE; BÁRCENA, 2015).

In the next sections, we introduce Connectivism, as a theory to explain MOOCs, describe the main characteristics of some courses analyzed, compare them with the principles established by the theory, and conclude with some suggestions on how to design what should be seen as a good MOOC for language teaching.

Connectivism and MOOC's

In a 2003 article entitled *Learning Ecology, Communities, and Networks: extending the classroom*, George Siemens began to outline the first draft of what would become, in his view, a new learning theory: Connectivism. Later, in 2006, Siemens launched *Knowing Knowledge*, published with a *Creative Commons* license, in which he explains his theory in more depth, adding important reinforcements mainly from the collaboration of Stephen Downes and reaching the world with the launching of the first known MOOC in 2008, in which more than 2,200 people dedicated themselves to discussing the subject in an online course.

In the words of those who created the concept:

A MOOC is an online course with the option of free and open registration, a publicly shared curriculum, and open-ended outcomes. MOOCs integrate social networking, accessible online resources, and are facilitated by leading practitioners in the field of study. Most significantly, MOOCs build on the engagement of learners who self-organize their participation according to learning goals, prior knowledge and skills, and common interests. (SIEMENS et al., 2010, p.10).

With respect to Connectivist Learning Theory, the first and most important concept of Siemens is that of the Ecology of the Learning. According to the author, ecologies are shared and collaborative means of building knowledge, in which one of the main factors for development is the existence of people connected to each other, such as nodes composing a web, similar to the Web of Life conceptualized by

Capra (2006), a kind of living organism that is self-organized, dynamic, adaptable, and sometimes confused and chaotic, but where the emergence of knowledge is fully possible. From this point of view, Siemens (2010) identifies a series of elements necessary for learning to emerge:

- Learning and knowledge rest on diversity of opinions.
- Learning is a process of connecting specialized nodes or sources of information.
- The promotion and maintenance of connections are fundamental movements to facilitate continuous learning.
- The ability to see connections between ideas, concepts and areas of knowledge is a crucial competence.
- The ability to continually expand knowledge is more important than what we know at any given time.
- Decision making is, by itself, a learning process.
- Learning can reside in non-human devices.

Although Siemens and his colleagues seek to emphasize the fact that Connectivism addresses the need for a theory that looks at learning in digital media, it is important to have it clear that there are many critics who insist that, in terms of learning theories, the ideas that underline connectivism are nothing new (KOP; HILL, 2008). Responding to these researchers, Siemens (2010) seeks to highlight some aspects which, in his view, would be exclusive to his theory

- The contemplation of principles that govern learning in different scopes: conceptual, biological, neural, social, etc.
- Attention to information abundance, speed and impact on understanding, interpretation, construction of knowledge today.
- The importance given to the concept of networking and how the connections that are established with other humans and even with databases interfere in learning.
- The emphasis on digital technologies as a key part of the distribution of cognition and knowledge.

Siemens and his colleagues, thinking about how these principles apply to online education, list some characteristics that they consider to be crucial in courses developed in digital platforms, as the case of MOOCs, in an effective way:

- High levels of student control over modes and places of interaction.
- Weekly synchronous sessions with facilitators and guest speakers.
- A daily newsletter email as a regular point of contact for course participants.

- Use of Really Simple Syndication (RSS, an automatic information updating system) to follow the participants' blogs.
- Emphasis on student autonomy regarding selection of learning resources and level of participation in activities.
- Emphasis on social systems as effective means of self-organization of students.

Although these seem to be required characteristics for a mass online course to be effectively considered a MOOC, researchers such as Bates (2014) suggest that, currently, MOOCs can be divided into two types: xMOOCs and cMOOCs. The xMOOCs would have little or no flexible organization, centered on content and the figure of the teacher. Using xMOOCs, we would work exclusively on a platform specifically designed for the purpose of the course, with video-readings, automatic response activities, peer review, some space to share opinions and discussions, little or no moderation in the discussions. They would be the most common type, present in most popular platforms like Coursera, edX, Miriada X. In fact, the “x” of xMOOC would refer precisely to this type of platform, which would force the courses to a monolithic format.

The cMOOCs, on the other hand, would be more in line with the criteria proposed by Siemens and his partners. The relationship is transparent, since the “c” alludes precisely to Connectivism. Using cMOOCs, we would have more space, there would be more space for learner’s autonomy, prioritizing the connection between students and accepting the use of a diversity of tools and means, at the discretion of the students themselves, including social media and tools for collaborative creation. There would be no room for formal evaluations and the teacher would have an auxiliary role, guiding learning without directly interfering.

Student protagonism, in this model, becomes clear especially from the Principle of the Criticality of Creation, according to which “[...] learners create and share their understanding of the course topics through blogs, concept maps, videos, images, and podcasts. Creating a digital artifact helps learners to re-centre the course discussion to a more personal basis.” (SIEMENS et al., 2010, p.23).

In the next section, we analyze two language courses, offered as MOOCs, based on the criteria defined from the Connectivist principles. We have no doubt that there are other learning theories that could account for a study on MOOCs. Our aim, however, is to verify whether the theory built under the aegis of MOOCs is robust enough for a profound analysis of this course model and whether, in fact, MOOCs fulfill the promise of educational innovation that has followed them since their creation.

Between Spanish and Mandarin

The present investigation was developed during the second semester of 2016 and depended on the work of ten assistant researchers who became involved as students

in different MOOCs offered in different platforms, following the norms of participant observation for data collection (FLICK, 2009). The initial intention was to evaluate language courses in this format. At the time the group was involved in data collection, and due to the criterion of gratuity, only two language courses were available, Spanish and Mandarin. In order not to take advantage of the time available and be able to collect data from the platforms, the group decided to enlarge inclusion criteria, allowing for the analysis of courses focused on literature, foreign language culture and online teaching pedagogies. All courses were attended by two or three researchers, who made their observations and notes individually. The collected data were then shared and debated in research group meetings in the light of Connectivism, which led to the conclusions shown below.

In this section, we present the pertinent results to the analysis of the two language courses that we were able to follow. In the next, we bring some additional information that could be collected from the other courses.

The language MOOCs that we could access in the second half of 2016 were: *Aprende chino para negocios* (Learn Chinese for Business) and *Español en Línea ELE* (Online Spanish). The first, made available on the UNIMOOC platform, was developed by Lun Yu Chinese School, based in Madrid, Spain. It is a school specializing in teaching Mandarin to Spanish speakers. The school offers the MOOC as a kind of introduction to the language, inviting students from its face-to-face courses. In its publicity material, the school claims to follow the criteria of the Confucius Institute for language teaching. The Institute is an official organization dedicated to the dissemination of the language, with insertion in several western universities, such as Unesp, in Brazil, by means of accords and including specific teaching and learning standards, like the Common European Framework of Reference for the Teaching of Languages.

The second course was developed by UNED, the National University of Distance Education of Spain. Created in the early 1970s, UNED is today the largest Spanish university, with more than 250,000 students enrolled. In addition to its 26 undergraduate and 43 master's level courses, UNED has invested heavily in MOOCs and has even created a platform for its massive courses: UNED-COMA (COMA is the acronym in Spanish for *Cursos Online Masivos Abiertos*).

To carry out the analysis of the courses, the research group developed an observation guide based on the criteria established by the Connectivist Learning Theory for the characterization of a MOOC. The guide was composed of questions that could guide the researchers in their observations and reflections on the courses they were participating in. The guide was composed of 16 questions:

1. What was proposed at the beginning of the course was consistent with its final result?
2. Is the course divided into units?
3. If yes, did the units have clear, explicit and well-defined objectives? Add comments.

4. When starting a unit, is it clear what the trainee is expected to develop in terms of knowledge and skills?
5. Do units have suggested or mandatory time? If so, how much? Is there flexibility to finish a unit? If it is not completed within the specified time, is there any loss or penalty for the student?
6. When you move to a new unit, do you feel that you have mastered the contents of the previous unit? Do you feel valued, self-assessed and able to go on?
7. Does the course present a didactic guide that helps to situate the student in the course, indicating the unit in which he/she is, what he/she has already covered and what is still ahead? If so, describe how the guide is presented and what elements make it up.
8. What types of assessment are presented throughout the course?
9. Is the course taught by a single teacher or a group of teachers? In the case of a group, does there seem to be a responsible teacher working with collaborators or do they work independently?
10. Does the course have discussion forums? If so, what are their goals? How do they work?
11. Does the course have PDF or PPT materials? If yes, what kind of content do they have? How are they structured (texts, images, etc.)?
12. Does the course have videos? If yes, what are their goals? Are they teacher talks, or do they involve other types (animations, short films etc.)? What is the average duration? Were there any exceptions (very long or very short)?
13. Was there any kind of videoconference with the teachers or between students? If yes, how did it work?
14. Are there other materials offered by the course to the student?
15. Overall, were you satisfied with the course? What did you like the most and what did you like the least about this experience?
16. Is there any other information you would like to add?

In our analysis, we will not follow the strict sequence of the questions as presented above. Trying to be more dynamic and making our reflections more objective, we will group the questions into categories, as follows: course structure, available materials, interaction, assessments and global perception of learning.

As far as structure is concerned, we will start our analysis by breaking the course down into units. Following the Connectivist principles, it is important for the students to understand the process from the beginning, being able to visualize the course tutorial to facilitate their choices in terms of their learning strategies. The student needs to have control of their learning process, and because of this, the course structure must be transparent. In this sense, the Mandarin course was clearly divided into six lessons, all of them with topics defined a priori. The Spanish course, however, was divided into modules: Presentation, Modules 0 to 4 and Closing, but only in the Presentation there is a description of unit 1. The description is made in Spanish, French, English

and Portuguese. The other units do not have the objectives described. The only way for the student to know what to expect to learn is from the unit title. In neither course there is a requirement or even a stipulation of time to study the content and complete the assignments. The students are totally free to set the speed of their progress. In addition, in both cases, the students have a progress indicator available for them. Whenever you log in, you are referred to where you left off. In the case of the UNIMOOC platform, in the Mandarin course, the system specifies the current lesson with black letters, in contrast to the blue color of previous lessons and those to come. The COMA platform, on the other hand, uses blue to indicate previous titles.

In terms of available materials, the Mandarin course is basically made up of videos. Each lesson is presented through a single video of approximately four minutes, except for the last two, which have seven and eight minutes, respectively, in which one of the teachers who takes turns in the presentation of the subjects gives explanations in Spanish and pronounces the words and expressions in the target language. Additionally, next to each video there is a “More content” button. By clicking on it, students are referred to a Google Docs link where they have access to a text file with vocabulary. It is a table with four columns: the Chinese ideogram, the corresponding writing in western characters, the grammatical category and the meaning. In the same way, the Spanish course is presented mainly by videos. Some are reproduced from Power Point presentations offering grammatical explanations with the teacher’s voice in the background. In general, the videos are eight to nine minutes. The longest is one of the first, which explains the structure of a film review, lasting around fifteen minutes. There are images and texts used in a harmonic way, without excesses in any part. In addition to the videos, the Spanish course also has audio material in MP3 format. Interaction was practically nonexistent in both cases.

This is surprising considering that the theory underlying MOOCs emphasizes students’ socialization and self-organization. For Connectivism, digital media should serve as a bridge between learners. Learning takes place when the networks are created, with nodes provided with databases, applications and other technological tools, but for learning to occur human touch and interaction must be added. In the case of the Mandarin course, there is only one forum for solving doubts, where students can resort to the organizing team to help. If students ask no questions, however, there is no direct contact with teachers at any time. Even less with other students. At no time is this interaction possible. The Spanish course is not very different. Here, however, not even a forum is available for the students to ask help from teachers. The only interaction that occurs is the delivery of the final work, which is sent to the team, who will evaluate and give feedback.

As far as assessments are concerned, the Mandarin course presents some multiple-choice questions at the end of each of the six lessons. After the lessons are completed, there is a test with five questions, also in multiple-choice format. When answering at least four correctly (80%), the trainee obtains a free certificate issued by the University of Alicante, a partner of the Lun Yu School. In the Spanish course, there are multiple

choice exercises interspersed with writing exercises. All are submitted, but only the final task receives feedback from the team responsible for the course. This is a generic feedback, in which the evaluator congratulates the student and thanks for the participation. The course offers certificate only with payment.

Finally, we come to the last point, which concerns the global perception of learning. The observations made by the assistant researchers, first individually and later discussed in the meeting, as already mentioned, lead to the conclusion that the courses did not completely respond to what had been proposed. In the case of the Mandarin course, the objective of the course would be “to provide basic knowledge of Mandarin, which will allow to establish business in China”. Considering the complexity of Mandarin, a distant language to speakers of Spanish and Portuguese, it would be naïve to expect that a ten-hour course would be enough to achieve this objective, although very modest. Even with such a timid goal, the course delivers less than it promises, reducing itself to explore, superficially, the tonal structure of the Chinese pronunciation, aspects related to greetings and courtesy, business card etiquette and numerals. Hardly would anyone be able to make an expressive import/export agreement with so few elements. Obviously, the course will help those who have the support of an interpreter, allowing them to express small courtesies in the target language, which will certainly be well received by the hosts, but the language skills developed do not exceed this modest limit.

The data collected in relation to the Spanish course showed similar results. Despite presenting itself as a course based on the exploration of the cinematographic review genre, little was worked within this focus. Only the first modules explore the topic. The others turn to grammar, pure and simple. Still, the assistant researchers concluded that, from a grammatical perspective, the course gave an account of presenting, discussing and teaching some rudiments of Spanish. What most attracted the attention, in a positive way, was the fact that the MOOC was clearly designed for students who already had some notion of Spanish, being suitable for students of level A2, according to the European Common Framework. In this sense, in the introduction of the course itself, a link was made available so that the interested party could take a level test to know in advance if he would be able to follow up. In any case, with almost no interaction and an unfulfilled work proposal, the course does not seem to achieve the objectives it proposes.

So far, we have been able to get a clear view of how the two language courses presented as MOOCs by their creators should work and how they really worked. Two different language courses were evaluated, available on different platforms and by different institutions. In the next section, we will present ten other courses. We will not delve deeply into these MOOCs. The intent is simply to demonstrate the variety of existing courses, the platforms and institutions that make them available, and to make some general comments that can help us gain insight into how these MOOCs have worked and what may still be missing so that they become adequate to a Connectivist perspective.

From Quixote to blended learning: variations on the same theme

As we mentioned from the beginning, we found only two language courses available in the second half of 2016 and none of them on the more traditional platforms, *Coursera* and *edX*. We then explored other courses, according to the criteria already mentioned. Courses in Portuguese or Spanish were chosen as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Courses, universities and platforms

COURSE	UNIVERSITY	PLATFORM
Educación de calidad para todos. Equidad, inclusión y atención a la diversidad	Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.	edX
El desafío de Innovar en la Educación Superior	Universidad de Chile	Coursera
Ensino Híbrido: Personalização e Tecnologia na Educação	USP e UNESP	Coursera
Explorando os recursos educacionais da Khan Academy	Fundação Lemann, Instituto Península, Instituto Natura, Ismart	Coursera
Fundamentos do Google para o Ensino	Fundação Lemann, Foreducation & Google for Education	Coursera
Hacia una práctica constructivista en el aula	Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile	Coursera
Introducción al Aprendizaje Basado en Problemas	Universidad Zaragoza	Miriada X
La España de El Quijote	Universidad Autónoma de Madrid	edX
Técnicas Cuantitativas y Cualitativas para la Investigación	Universitat Politècnica de València – UPV	edX
Tecnologías para la educación	Universitat Politècnica de València – UPV	edX

Source: Own elaboration.

The courses are listed alphabetically. Five of them were made available on the *Coursera* platform and four on *edX*. A final course was found on the Miriada X platform, a Spanish platform linked to Universia, the largest network of Ibero-American universities, based in Spain and linked to Banco Santander.

In general, the criticisms made to these ten courses were the same as those made to the first two. The exception is the organization of the *edX* platform courses, which present some of the elements proposed by the Connectivist Learning Theory, such as explicit objectives, defined deadlines, syllabus, and data that students need to organize

their trajectory and prepare their study strategies. This, however, does not seem to be the merit of the institutions, but of the platform, which submits the courses to a standardized structure.

The biggest criticisms, again, fell on little interaction and lack of feedback. In general, students are not placed in situations where they must interact. Even teachers do not often interact. There are courses, for example, where there is a list of responsible teachers and only one or two appear in the videos. The students never get to know them. Not even in the course presentation video they show up. In some circumstances, however, the expected presence of teachers does not promote the desired motivation: monotonal readings from Power Point presentations filled with text or extensive readings in front of the cameras. This simple transposition from face-to-face to the virtual context bores the students and can be one of the reasons that lead to the high attrition rates found in this type of course. According to a survey conducted in 2013, attrition numbers are so high that only 2% to 14% of students concluded the courses (PERNA et al., 2013).

The frequent evaluations of activities with the concise “Very good!” or “Congratulations, keep it up!” – when there is feedback – is another obstacle to retain the students. There is no stimulating debate. The teachers do evaluate their student tasks, but because they have thousands of students, they either end up by restricting evaluation to a minimum or use peer-to-peer (p2p) evaluation, with little guidance on how to review each other’s activities. The result is that feedback is reduced to the emotional level, avoiding content or technical aspects.

One of the assistant researchers in the group, who collaborated in the participant observations, due to lack of interaction, no feedback and the continuous requirements to fill out satisfaction questionnaires in one of the courses, stated at the last meeting of the research group to discuss the data collected, that as a student, she did not feel important: “It even seems like they were studying us”. Considering the very strong marketing bias one perceives in some of the courses, it is possible, that the objective is to advertise their graduate courses online, paid in euros or dollars.

There are, however, good points. Videos with dialogues or dramatizations gave a more playful tone to the contents and managed to capture students’ attention. Teachers who know how to dialogue with the camera without being stuck in presentations or texts were also positively evaluated. Another aspect found in some courses was flexibility in the final assignment. The possibility of exploring different media and tools to produce the final project, with a generative theme, and a format free from monolithic molds seemed to yield interesting materials, giving the students creative freedom.

In the next section, based on the positive and negative aspects we found, and considering the principles of Connectivism, we present our final considerations, bringing some elements that we consider important for a language course in the MOOC format.

Looking for new roads

Taking the same sequence from our analysis, we will begin this section by taking up our considerations about the desirable structure of a MOOC from the Connectivist Learning Theory in contrast to what was found in our research. So, regarding the structure of MOOCs, we need to emphasize the need for them to be transparent. A course needs to have its overall goal clearly defined from the beginning, as well as the specific objectives of each unit, which need to be visible and comprehensible by the students. A student cannot start a unit without a full view of its objective, because this is the only way to comply with the principle of self-organization, according to Siemens, for whom students can only organize themselves if the learning goals are clear. It is important to remember that self-organization is a fundamental element in Connectivism. We do not learn alone. We learn when we form networks with learning tools and with other people and these connections become meaningful only if we know very clearly where we are at any moment and where we need to go, as object-oriented human beings.

Considering available materials and interaction, we believe the most important result from this investigation is the finding that the way teachers present themselves in videos is critical. No matter how well a video is designed and produced, it will lead to poor results if it does not reflect, at least in part, human interaction. The teacher needs to be able to interact with the camera, talk to the people on the other side. He must also refrain from long and tedious readings or from hiding behind presentations with abundant texts. He can use dialogues with colleagues, simulating – or actually doing – brief interviews, always trying to set the right tone, without excessive formality or extreme informality. Creative role plays to demonstrate some point or content are often welcomed. Also, videos should never be too long. If a topic is too long, it is more productive to break it down into several small videos. Salman Khan, for example, founder of Khan Academy, suggests that an exhibition video should not exceed ten minutes (KHAN, 2013). Another useful suggestion is that these videos have a transcript in PDF, so that the student can consult a specific point later, whenever necessary, without having to watch the video all over again. If possible subtitles should be offered in different languages, considering that a MOOCs may reach the whole world.

As far as assessment is concerned, it is important to respect the principle of student autonomy. Testing restricted to multiple-choice items contribute very little to learning. Fewer evaluations, allowing for students to express themselves and use their creativity, tend to be more welcomed and yield better results. In general, considering the courses we analyzed, the assistant researchers felt more at ease in those where they could freely use any tool to carry out some type of production that involved their personal perception regarding the content studied. In one course, for example, students were given the freedom to design a digital artifact, to use Siemens terminology, to synthesize their understanding of one of the topics covered. The artifacts were sent to peers in a p2p system for evaluation. Videos, animations and other objects were made using different resources available to students. They were given complete freedom. By

producing their own materials and evaluating their peers' materials, students deepened and consolidated a more profound learning process. Making room for the students to choose their own readings and relate them to the content covered in the course also proved to be a positive point.

Finally, it is important to note that in none of the MOOCs analyzed we found those aspects, which are regarded as basic by Siemens in this type of course, such as weekly synchronous sessions with invited speakers and facilitators, daily email newsletters, use of RSS to follow course participants' blogs; emphasis on social systems as effective means of self-organization for students, etc. It seems that many advances are still needed for the reality of MOOCs to meet the theory.

We described in this paper the results of our investigation and offered some suggestions on how a MOOC for language teaching should be designed to be significant and efficient considering the concepts that guide Connectivist Learning Theory. There are still several gaps that need to be filled, including: (1) more suggestions for creating such courses; (2) clear definition of the elements that are essential for the proper functioning of the courses, with meaningful results for the students; (3) design of a metaMOOC, i. e. a MOOC that discusses and presents the necessary suggestions for designing a Massive Online Open Course, oriented to the teaching of languages.

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- *RESUMO: Com o aumento da oferta na rede mundial de computadores dos chamados Cursos Online Massivos e Abertos, mais conhecidos por seu acrônimo em inglês MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses), cria-se a necessidade de que se pesquise de maneira mais aprofundada sua dinâmica, sua pedagogia e sua estrutura a fim de que se possa estabelecer um juízo sobre as possibilidades de uso efetivo desta nova ferramenta para o ensino de línguas estrangeiras. Neste trabalho, situado no âmbito das pesquisas em CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), partimos da perspectiva da Teoria Conectivista, estabelecida, sobretudo, a partir dos estudos de Siemens e Downes, para analisar dois cursos de línguas estrangeiras na modalidade MOOC, oferecidos em diferentes plataformas digitais: o curso de espanhol para estrangeiros oferecido pela UNED em plataforma própria e o curso de mandarim para hispanofalantes veiculado pela plataforma UNIMOOC. Em ambos os casos, evidencia-se que os cursos não cumprem o que prometem, apresentando falhas no processo de ensino, sobretudo no que tange à necessidade de criar espaços propícios à interação. Este trabalho inscreve-se em uma proposta de pesquisa mais ampla, cujo objetivo é estabelecer critérios adequados para a criação de MOOCs para o ensino de línguas estrangeiras.*
- *PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ensino de línguas estrangeiras. CALL. MOOCs. Conectivismo.*

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