ENGLISH LANGUAGE INFLUENCE IN COURSERA MOOC

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Abstract:  
This dissertation treats about the analysis of the most modern methodologies used for English language use, that are used to the development of the e-learning field within the educational system. This is important due to its relevance for the community of teachers and students. It will be developed through the comparison of English language use on an e-learning platform, named Coursera, by comparing the English language use with the rest of the worldwide languages (that are included in the offer of e-learning courses into the same platform). In this research it will be discussed the impact of the English language used in the field of e-learning, by using Coursera platform, in order to help teachers and the students community to improve the e-learning and educational system, their skills and competences. Further researches should be studied in this field with such relevance for the Education.
1. STARTING POINT AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Massive Open Online Courses (from now on MOOC) and other acronyms that have emerged over years have revolutionized the e-learning techniques and strategies in recent years. Although it seems that the concept MOOC is relatively new, as early as 2,008, it is possible to talk about MOOC with "Connectivism and Connective knowledge" in a course offered by the University of Manitoba (Canada) in which more than 2,000 students were enrolled (Sandeen, 2013, p. 35). However, it was not until the year 2011 when the MOOC format showed its flaws and virtues (Friedman, 2013). These courses are designed for a mass audience with an open enrollment for all users who wish to join them. The main characteristics of MOOC courses are that they are based on short audiovisual videos; learning peer-to-peer, students enter and interact through the use of forums and social network communities and by using common consortia platform that facilitates their global spread, as for instance in the case of the Coursera platform (Coursera, 2016), MiriadaX (MiriadaX, 2015) or edX (edX, 2016).

The reason for choosing Cousera in this research is two-fold. Firstly, because Coursera is one of the few platforms that allows obtaining information about the language used in published courses; and secondly, because it is one of the platforms that offers courses published in more than 50 languages. Within the global and open knowledge in which MOOC moves, it is very important that the language does not become a barrier for the democratization of knowledge by the ignorance of this language. Through this research and making use of the possibilities provided by the MOOC platforms it is essential to know the importance of the set of courses published by Coursera in several languages like "English, Spanish, Chinese, German or French". Therefore, the percentage of courses of Coursera platform using the languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, German or French has been calculated. Finally, with this information it will be discriminated the different fields of study of the platform and by specifying the languages of instruction and the language of the subtitle of each course, the importance of each language in Coursera platform is accomplished.

The methodology to be used is quantitative, that means statistical data will be compared directly from the virtual platform Coursera, as it was mentioned before. This platform offers courses to twenty-eight countries distributed around the world that have been selected previously for the same platform; therefore, the main purpose is to analyze the scope and productivity of English language use in these courses in these countries. It should be mentioned that there are several e-learning platforms offering courses worldwide, even some of these platforms offer the whole of their courses in English language, but the only
platform that contains relevant and enough data to study English language use by making a comparative research is Coursera.

Hypothesis: MOOC, according to Arenas (2015, p. 9) “most of the courses are offered exclusively in English (both content and teaching), which obstructs access for those who do not have an advanced level of this language”.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The percentage of courses of Coursera platform using languages as: English, Spanish, Chinese, German or French, (to reduce the samples) has been calculated. The specific objectives based on the general target are:

• Determine and quantify the courses published on the Coursera platform.

• Determine and quantify Coursera courses conforming the different "fields of study" within the platform structure, by discriminating each course by language of instruction, and language of subtitles.

• Determine and quantify the courses in which the language of instruction is entirely the same language that the language used for subtitles.

• Determine and quantify the courses in which the language of instruction is different from the subtitles in the same course, (emphasis from the author).

The data collection instruments used for the analysis proposed in this paper initially requires a compilation or recount of the necessary samples to show the languages used in the Coursera courses. In this research is very important the interval of time referred to the date of calculation of data, because Coursera is a global and daily platform that changes, both the number of courses offered, partners that offer courses, and the languages in which these courses are held.

3. SUCCINCT EXPLANATION OF EACH STAGE WITHIN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Virtual learning is a way of distance learning that use ICT in their development and where there is a physical separation between teacher and student. Several definitions are found for this terminology from different authors as for instance, "e-learning is a learning produced through a digital-technological medium" (Rubio, 2003, p. 101),"e-learning is just-in-time training, applied where and when needed, regardless of times, locations or sizes of the group" (Gargia et al., 2003, p.3).
The basic characteristics of e-learning are to access information using HTTP and HTTPS protocols, there is no need the competition in the teacher-student connections, separated by space and time; the learning through computers, tablets, mobiles and other devices; using a wide range of communication tools, as for instance forums, chats and videoconferencing. Using hypertext-hypermedia information, the students are able to go forward, rewind, or obtain depth information according to the nature of learning project. Digital materials are stored, maintained and administered on a web server. Finally, e-learning has the possibility to be individual or collaborative, meaning training just-in-time, when and where needed (emphasis from the author).

On the other hand, as Andrade (2007, p.4) defines “the term blended learning denotes the methodologies or strategies that combine formats to achieve better learning outcomes”. Moreno A. (2011) commented the two modalities' features, e-learning and face to face classes that highlight their most important differences in the next paragraphs:

- Features based on the e-learning: Independent work of the student; new forms of interaction between teachers and students; fast updating of the material; cost reduction, usually caused by the displacement, accommodation, etc; elimination of spatial barriers and temporary and flexibility to carry out several courses activities because it is not necessary that all the participants agree on one place and time.

- Features based on classroom training: Application of knowledge, physical interaction, having a significant impact on the motivation of participants; it facilitates the establishment of social nets and provides to the students the ability to perform complex activities.

3.1. E-learning at Málaga University

The main target of the Virtual Campus is to provide the university community with all the support that ICT could contribute, in order to improve the teaching-learning process and extend the web of the University Campus (UMA, 2016).

In the PDI training Plan (at University of Málaga 2015-16), there is a course on "how to create a MOOC". In this MOOC course the design contents and monitoring of a massive course will be instructed. The recommendations and experience of content are offered by the Technological Laboratories of the Virtual Teaching Service. (UMA, 2015, p. 100). Moreover, the University of Málaga has a project called SLEST 2.0 (SLEST2.0, 2016), this project of Málaga University and the University of Selcuk specialized in e-learning and blended learning, has an agreement and a license Creative Commons (Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivates 4.0) (Creative Commons, 2015) The
aims of the project is to create specific online language learning materials in the field of tourism, and to adapt Learning contents to the real requirements of professionals. The components of the team from the University of Málaga are expert researchers from the Departments of English, French and German and Language and Computer Science. All of them work in order to make Second Language Acquisition (L2)-material available at the right time and in the right way to people who work in tourism, shifting in this way the classroom from a traditional to a non-traditional context, (adam-europe, 2013). In this context, and in the light of this research, this type of projects would be perfect to save the difficulties when a Second Language Acquisition is not known, (emphasis by the author).

3.2. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)

Nowadays, there are several initiatives of open knowledge available in institutions of higher education. On the one hand, the initiative of the MIT OpenCourseWare with (OCW) which gives the universities an open access to the contents of their modules, and in the other (SPOC and NOOC) that have emerged to give an answer to the MOOC's problems, (emphasis by the author). The main characteristics that must have a course to be considered a MOOC course according to Arenas, (2015, p.4) are:

- To be a course, to be open and to be on-line. It should allow free access to contents and the implementation of planned activities. The only requirement is the student's record in this platform where the MOOC course is hosted. After completion the MOOC course, the student may request a certificate of the acquired knowledge that entails a fee. The content of the courses is designed to be delivered by, or on, the Internet as the core communication medium. Being massive, this implies accepting an unlimited number of registrations, or a much larger number of participants than in a traditional face-to-face course, with a global reach, and not necessarily an academic audience.

The scope of the MOOC is global and not necessarily at the university. The format of these courses is based on audiovisual material to facilitate learning and to share on-line teaching concepts such as tutoring students, weekly planning, scheduling activities and course registration.
3.3. Coursera

The courses of Coursera are brief videos consumed by participants via Internet (MOOC). These videos allow students to access to these courses that have been developed by universities and institutions of great prestige in an open way. Currently, MOOC is one of the platforms with more users (with 15.8 million students forming in more than 2,300 courses from 145 institutions and universities worldwide) (Orri, 2016).

To access to the courses offered, like in any MOOC platform, it is necessary a previous free user registration. The accessibility to these courses does not require having previous training requirements. After clicking on any course listed in the platform it appears a short description of the purpose of the course, language, planning, authors and criteria to complete the course, etc. By having access to the free pre-registration course, the student/user is part of the course, besides having access to contents and other materials. Before the start date of the course due to its massive character, the platform sends the students a reminder of the date of beginning of the course. These courses usually offer two options, the free option, in which, the course is not certificated, and the payment option, where the certification of successful completion is included.

The course contents are mainly video modules supported by various tools and additional material like: course overview, syllabus, readings, peer assessment, grading and logistics, discussion forum and surveys (Arnis, 2015, p. 231). The video modules, as a rule, tend to intersperse the course teacher explaining concepts or terms with transparencies or slides to clarify the explanation. These videos should be subtitled to facilitate access to these courses and simplifying the listening. The sequencing of content: There are teachers who publish all content on the first day in order to make clear the course content to students, but there are other teachers that published weekly videos and additional material, that matches the course planning. Each Coursera course has various durations of study, ranging from 4 weeks to 12 weeks and commonly requires 4-6 hour workload in a week (Arnis, 2015, p. 232). The evaluation of knowledge acquired by students in order to choose the certification usually is a self-correcting test, although there are other options, such as peer assessment. Coursera was founded with the purpose of making free access to quality education for anyone, anywhere possible. For this reason the platform courses published by various institutions and universities around the world are offered by Coursera, (Universities, Colleges and Institution) spread over 28 countries worldwide. Due to the number of courses currently offered by Coursera, it is necessary a mechanism to classify them and to provide an easy way to locate prospective students. For this task, Coursera courses classify areas or fields of study. Currently, they are categorized courses in 10 areas of study.
In addition, there is the possibility for the user to locate a course based on a particular field of study, because they could be interested in a particular training offered by a particular partner with the quality or reputation desired. To this purpose, Coursera allows the student to know the list of courses offered by each partner. The evaluation of knowledge acquired by students in order to choose the certification usually is a self-correcting test, although there are other options, such as peer assessment, (Coursera, 2016).

As mentioned before, MOOC is destined to provide a global massive education to the society, with different languages of instruction. The main content of a MOOC course are the videos; therefore, in Coursera when classifying the languages of instruction, it should be distinguished between: language used in the audio of the videos and language used in the subtitles of the videos.

Coursera offers courses in more than 50 languages (both audio and subtitle levels) in Spanish, English, German, French, Chinese, Russian, Hungarian, Mongolian, Hebrew, etc. MOOC is one of the few platforms that provide data of the number of courses that meet with certain search filters; such for instance, (audio course in English language and Spanish language subtitles). This characteristic lets the performance of this research. In order to limit this work, the study is going to be carried out about the number of courses offered in the specific languages: Spanish, English, German, French and Chinese, but considering this set of languages for both audio and subtitle. At this point, it is very important the issue of the use of the word now, it should be remembered that Coursera is a global platform with a daily change (both the number of courses offered, partners that offer the courses and languages in which these courses are taught, (emphasis by the author).

Coursera offers 2,361 courses distributed between ten fields of study. To each field of study is indicated the number of courses of this concrete field of study together with the percentage of Coursera total courses. The quantitative study indicates the language in which a course is taught, with each language used in the subtitles, and in each field of study that Coursera offers. By focusing on the contents of each cell (from data obtained of this study tables), it is shown the total courses offered for that combination of language of instruction and language of subtitle with the percentage represented by the total of courses of the concrete study field. For instance, it appears "language of instruction: English; subtitle: Spanish => 15 to 2.4%"; therefore it is indicated that 15 courses are taught in English with Spanish subtitles, 15 is the number representing 2.4% of the total courses that are offered in the field of study “Business”.

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4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

From the analysis of the information obtained from data, the conclusions are the following:

The prevalence of courses taught entirely in English (audio and subtitles) in every field of study. The absence of courses taught in German, with the exception of German subtitles in some courses imparted in English, French and Chinese. (The reason is that Coursera has an agreement to publish courses with two German institutions, "Technische Universität München (TUM)" and "Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU)". The TUM currently has not published any course, while the LMU currently has published five courses), and from these five courses, one of them is taught in English, two of them are taught in English (with subtitles in Chinese) and the other two remaining conversely, are taught in Chinese and English subtitles.

Whether courses taught entirely in the same language (audio and subtitles) are eliminated, it is shown that subtitles most used in the courses are English subtitles (4.1%), followed by China (3.5%). In each field of study there are courses taught entirely in the same language (included subtitles), with the exception in the field of study "Language Learning", in which there is not any course taught in French or German languages. 75% of total Coursera courses are taught entirely in English language, while only 9% are taught in Spanish language.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, based in the results obtained from the studied data it is deduced,

It is obtained that 54% of Coursera courses are grouped between the fields of study: "Business", "Computer Sciences" and "Social Science". By providing opportunities to learn in such difficult fields of study, Coursera is providing students with an excellent on-line education experience with opportunities for socialization and collaboration. This is in harmony with the effort of society to be successful, and enhances the focus on quality of education in order to find better jobs.

The field of study that has the majority of the courses is "Business" with 26.1%, while the field of study with fewer courses is "Language Learning" with 3.1%. It can be concluded that there is the possibility that this kind of training was not appropriate for MOOC’s philosophy.
75% of Coursera courses are taught entirely in English, 9% are taught entirely in Spanish, 4.8% are taught entirely in Chinese and 2.9% are taught entirely in French. It is observed that none of the courses are taught entirely in German, except 0.4% of the courses that incorporate subtitles in German language. The reason for this may lie on the fact that German citizens have a high command of English, spoken and written, in general terms.

88% of Coursera courses to learning languages (field of study: Language Learning) are in two languages: English with 73% and Spanish with 15%.

To conclude, through the methodology used in this dissertation and the results obtained, it can be deduced that the hypothesis established from the beginning of this research about the opening of the contents located into MOOC merely is confirmed. “Most of the courses are offered exclusively in English (both content and teaching), which obstructs access for those who do not have an advanced level of this language”, (Arenas, 2015, p. 9). In addition, it could be interpreted that English language is a worldwide language used; therefore, it could be said that its knowledge is almost compulsory to be able to have access to the updated information within the new technologies and a quality university education. SLEST 2, 0 is a type of project that could cover the needs of languages learning that have been detected in this research, by covering the needs to access to all e-learning courses without languages restriction, in order that everyone has access to all the open knowledge. (emphasis by the author).

The evaluation under the same conditions over different platforms from MOOC should be considered for further research. This would make possible to obtain the confirmation of the findings in this study in order to extrapolate them for improvement of present and future tools of this type and nature.

6. REFERENCES


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