THE LMOOC4SLAV PROJECT: ACADEMIC DISCOURSE FOR ACADEMIC MOBILITY

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Abstract

Every year, thanks to the Erasmus programme, thousands of students in Europe make part of their studies in another country using a second language (L2) they know with a proficiency level B1/B2. A path to facilitate a successful mobility exchange, as well as students' inclusion in a multicultural and multilingual environment through innovative learning and teaching practices offering educational models to modernize and internationalize the higher education system, and to place European training experiences on the global training scene through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are some of the main priorities of the LMOOC4Slav - Romance Languages for Slavic-speaking University Students, an Erasmus+ funded project (2021-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000027501).

Although not exclusively, its primary target audience consists of university students, mainly with Slavic languages as their mother tongue (L1), learning Romance languages, specifically Italian and Portuguese, who intend to do a mobility period at a university in Portugal or Italy, and also native Slavic-speaking teachers who teach Portuguese and Italian as L2 to those students.

The project centres around the production of two Language MOOCS (LMOOCs), one for Italian and the other for Portuguese, organised in six modules. The aim is to promote students' development of linguistic fluency in academic contexts and access to authentic academic situations and learning tools to enhance their ability to learn how to learn. It also focuses on developing a repertoire of Open Educational Resources (OERs) intended for Slavic language teachers and students of Portuguese and Italian as L2. These resources will allow their reuse in different learning environments, guided by an online pedagogical guide for integrating LMOOCs and OERs. The project outputs will remain available in an open-source repository after its end ensuring its sustainability.

Keywords: LMOOC, OER, Italian, Portuguese, Slavic Languages, Mobility, Academic discourse.

1 INTRODUCTION

One of the European Union's objectives is to promote mobility and mutual understanding between cultures and for every European citizen to have proficiency in two other languages in addition to his or her native language. European Union Erasmus+ programme offers a wide range of opportunities for mobility and cooperation, namely in education and professional training. Within its scope, thousands of students benefit every year from the possibility of making part of their studies in another country using a second language, be it English or the host country's native language, with a minimum proficiency level of B1/B2 [1].

Yet, as several studies have shown, the knowledge and skills needed for using an L2 in general communication differ from those required in academic settings (a.o. [2, 3, 4]). Academic language is used to acquire or deepen knowledge in different content areas and communicative academic situations and communicate that knowledge and understanding through different discourse genres and contexts. Therefore, academic language is characterised by specific linguistic features (namely syntactic, morphosyntactic, semantic, lexical, textual), specific language areas and modalities (formal and informal registers, oral and written genres), and a variety of disciplines (e.g., Languages, Tourism, Medicine, Law) that run within a particular sociocultural context and academic culture (see [2]).

So, students must develop their academic language competence not to suffer the negative impact that such a lack of language proficiency can have on their academic success while on mobility and on their ability to improve language skills in the long run. Fostering students' success on their educational path contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 4 - Quality Education -, which significantly contributes to the development of the remaining objectives, especially 16 - Peace and justice. Learning a foreign language is a powerful way to develop positive values that lead to a more multicultural and peaceful society.

Bearing this in mind, the project *LMOOC4Slav – Romance Languages for Slavic-Speaking University Students,* an Erasmus+ funded project (2021-1-IT02-KA220-HED-000027501), coordinated by the University for Foreigners of Perugia (Italy), in partnership with the University of Porto (Portugal), the University of Masaryk (Czech Republic), the Jagiellonian University (Poland), the SS. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (The Republic of North Macedonia), and the FENICE - National Federation of Teachers Centre of Initiative for Europe (Italy) proposes a learning path to promote the academic success of mobility students by creating a pedagogical approach and materials that facilitate the development of students' language and communicative academic skills in listening, reading, writing, and speaking in academic settings. Its primary target audience consists of university students, mainly Slavic-speaking students learning Romance languages, specifically Italian and Portuguese, who intend to do a mobility period at a university in Portugal or Italy.

In the Europe's linguistic mosaic, Slavic and Romance languages belong to widely represented language groups. Slavic languages are spoken by over 315 million people living in Eastern, Central-Eastern, and Balkan Europe and by a large group of immigrants living around the world (cf. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Slavic-languages). Learning a Romance language by Slavic speakers presents several challenges, including, for some Slavic languages, the need to acquire a different writing system. Considering the linguistic difficulties of Slavic university students when learning Portuguese and Italian, the project proposes some solutions to address them while facilitating the development of linguistic skills in academic contexts.

To achieve these objectives, the project offers a pedagogical approach and learning path based on developing quality and open resources for language learning in academic contexts by creating an integrated and customizable learning environment to be used by recipients in an autonomous and self-paced way.

The development of pedagogical experiences and materials focusing on academic discourse through LMOOCs and even OERs has known a certain level of development, especially in recent years. Moreover, the specificity of MOOCs and OERs as their possible relationships has deserved the attention of researchers more recently [5].

Yet, at least to our knowledge, there is still very little work done in creating innovative and open access quality pedagogical resources and materials for teaching Italian and Portuguese for academic purposes, and none for Slavic-speaking students and teachers. Additionally, the interconnection between LMOOCs and OERs and their reuse in different learning environments according to the needs and interests of their users need further development to increase opportunities for successful students' mobility and future job prospects. This project aims to promote professional language networks in Europe at different levels to advance open education in Europe.

2 OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

In section 2, we present the global description of the project, focusing on its objectives (2.1), target audience (2.2), project steps (2.3), LMOOCs and OERs (2.4.), methodological options (2.5), main outcomes (2.6), expected results (2.7).

2.1 Objectives

The main objectives of the project are:

- Offer Slavic-speaking students a freely accessible online learning path considering their specific needs for studying abroad in Romance-speaking countries, such as Italy or Portugal through LMOOCs and OERs. We intend that the development of communicative linguistic competence progresses in parallel with the development of learning-to-learn skills, leading to an increasing level of autonomy in language learning and the achievement of good academic results in a shorter time frame than usually necessary, laying the foundations for the acquisition of other languages, increasing plurilingualism among European citizens.

- Support Italian L2 and Portuguese L2 teachers by creating a repertoire of OERs useful for Italian and Portuguese language learning using an audio-visual approach in an open-source repository that remains available beyond the project's duration.

- Develop an innovative approach to language learning for academic contexts by implementing practices, resources and tools that contribute to the advancement of open education in Europe.

- Advance research on L2 didactics, L2 acquisition, and educational technologies.
- Promote an international network of language professionals.

2.2 Target audience

The target audience of the project are mainly University students with Slavic languages as L1 learning Portuguese and Italian as L2 who want to make a mobility period in a university in Portugal or Italy, and teachers of Portuguese and/or Italian as L2 in Slavic-speaking countries.

Nevertheless, university students whose L1 is not a Slavic language may also benefit from the project outputs, along with teachers of Portuguese and/or Italian L2 teaching in other contexts than Slavic countries.

2.3 Project steps

The project runs for 30 months, between December 2021 and May 2024, and involves the following steps:

- Plan, design, and create two LMOOCs for academic purposes for Italian and Portuguese, each comprising six modules and addressing the specific language needs of the target group.
- Create Italian and Portuguese academic discourse OERs consisting of audio and video materials and written texts on academic topics related to different disciplinary fields.
- Design a pedagogical guide carefully explaining how to integrate the LMOOC and the OER into a pedagogical learning path.
- Plan, create, and develop a portal for teaching languages with LMOOCs and OERs with the function of an integrated and customizable learning environment to be used by recipients to organize and manage language-learning scenarios based on the OERs.
- Conduct a Pilot Phase (delivery and evaluation of the two LMOOCs).
- Create monitoring tools to evaluate the LMOOCs.
- Perform diverse dissemination actions.

2.4 LMOOCs and OERS

2.4.1 LMOOCs

The LMOOCs curriculum design has been guided by research investigating problematic language areas and academic sub-skills Slavic-speaking students need for their social and academic life in Italy and Portugal. The survey was addressed to Slav learners and Italian and Portuguese teachers working in Italian and Portuguese philology field, law, economics, medicine, and exact sciences. Questionnaires and in-depth interviews have been used to collect data.

The creation of online educational paths is a complex process determined by the characteristics of the specific learning environment [6]. In an environment with no space limits, accessible by thousands of students interested in learning the language, the first challenge is the definition of the user profile. It is necessary to consider the heterogeneity of LMOOCs' audience, setting significant and achievable general objectives for a broad range of user-profiles [7]. Therefore, the LMOOCs will contain language-specific submodules coupled with many activities aimed at developing skills in academic Italian/ Portuguese relevant for other learner groups as well.

As far as the general learning design is concerned, a hybrid design has been adopted, including objective-oriented and task-based models [8].

According to this model, the planned path comprises a succession of units, implemented through multiple learning objects, integrated by pedagogical tasks to be performed individually or in groups.

The fundamental element of the articulation of LMOOCs is the module or week. The LMOOCs will last six weeks, with six different modules (see Fig. 1) targeting the development of different transversal abilities relevant to all disciplines.

Each module will include video lessons, multimedia, textual documents, comprehension activities, quizzes, and a short written or oral production. Each module will contain sections referring to different

components of the course, such as teaching materials, forums, blogs, and wikis allowing collaborative writing [9]. An essential reference for the choice of activities and materials was the MOILLE framework (Massive Open Online Interactive Language Learning Environment) developed by [10]. As the authors state, «a successful and promising language learning environment should be interactive in multiple ways. It should provide opportunities for authentic communication as well as access to interactive and motivational educational material to learners. In this way they will be able to put real communication in practice, explore new forms of language, find out about the culture of the target language and generally practice and acquire all the core language skills» [10].
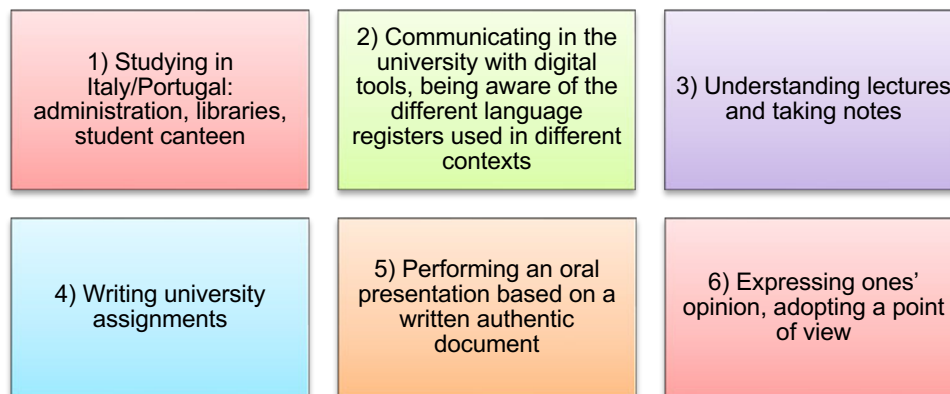
1) Studying in Italy/Portugal: administration, libraries, student canteen	2) Communicating in the university with digital tools, being aware of the different language registers used in different contexts	3) Understanding lectures and taking notes
4) Writing university assignments	5) Performing an oral presentation based on a written authentic document	6) Expressing ones' opinion, adopting a point of view

Figure 1: LMOOC modules

Finally, the design of an LMOOC must include a system for evaluating learners. The high number of participants imposes the use of objective tests, with automatic correction, aimed at verifying discrete linguistic knowledge, accompanied by peer evaluation and self-evaluation. For example, students can be invited to a communicative task within a discussion forum where they should answer a question and comment and evaluate the answers posted by others with the help of an evaluation grid. Both peer evaluation and self-evaluation favour reflection on one's own learning process and the development of the essential autonomy for learning the language online.

The LMOOCs of academic Italian/Portuguese have the following objectives, defined in terms of linguistic-communicative competencies and ability to learn in the educational field:

- Gain awareness of the language learning process and know how to use effective learning strategies.

- Become aware of the various registers existing in any language and which vary according to the communication situation.

- Develop comprehension strategies in the context of oral academic discourse (e.g., lectures); become aware of the role of taking notes.

- Develop strategies for understanding written expository texts relating to academic disciplines.

- Learn how to use electronic media and tools to improve the production of oral texts related to academic disciplines.

- Learn how to use online translators wisely and online research to improve the production of written texts in the field of academic disciplines.

- Become aware of the risks of plagiarism and the limits of automatic translation.

- Become aware of the possibilities and limitations of the numerous tools and communities available on the Internet.

2.4.2 OERs

As we have seen in §2.4.1, the LMOOCs will be structured with respect to the timing of assignments/activities (e.g., weekly modules) and the content of these assignments/activities. Generally, LMOOCs are more structured but less flexible than OERs, defined as "learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose,

adaptation and redistribution by others" [11]. 'Openness' is, in fact, an umbrella term that encompasses different meanings such as free, accessible, informal, manageable autonomously, flexible, innovative, delivered online, reusable, and belonging to the public domain [12]. To reduce the negative effects of the LMOOCs' rigidity, the project provides for creating OERs dedicated to teachers of L2 Italian and Portuguese and their students.

First, some elements of the LMOOCs (especially videos and some tasks or activities) will be reused as OERs and will be available for training in the periods in which the LMOOCs are not running. Other OERs will be created by the project having in mind to supplement the LMOOCs with discourses in diverse disciplines, together with other related Italian and Portuguese and already existing OERs. The OERs created by the project will include examples of video-recorded academic lessons, thus allowing reflection on the linguistic (morphosyntactic, lexical, textual) and paralinguistic elements of academic communication as well as on the kinaesthetic aspects and the socio-cultural characteristics of the Italian and Portuguese academic environment. Other inputs will be offered by written texts on academic topics related to different disciplinary fields. Finally, a further important OER will be the pedagogical guide that will contain a detailed description of both LMOOCs and the OERs, with specific instructions for each language. The Guide is intended to support the reuse of the materials in face-to-face, blended, or online contexts. The OERs created by the project and the links to relevant existing OERs will be made available from the project portal (https://www.lmooc4slav.eu/). The resources will be downloadable, including the video recordings with transcripts, the written texts, and several "ready to use" learning units.

The main objectives of OERs in this project are, among others:

- Support multilingualism.
- Facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, expertise, and savoir vivre of students engaged in international mobility.
- Empower learners and teachers through distance learning between peers or between tutor and student.
- Provide e-learning solutions for language teaching and learning.
- Validate skills and knowledge using internal certification.
- Promote autonomous and guided learning.

2.5   Methodological options

Research on foreign language acquisition has been concerned with creating better conditions for adequate and efficient learning. Such research benefits the conceptualization and planning of activities and materials for autonomous use in the e-learning environment. Krashen [13], with his input hypothesis, claimed the importance of the quality of linguistic input for L2 learning. Ellis [14] proposes the explicit teaching of grammar to accelerate learning. We can consider teaching academic discourse as part of the teaching of foreign languages for specific purposes [15, 16]. The aim is to provide students with the tools to develop written and oral academic skills, namely, to comply with the production of written and oral discourse genres, such as exams, essays, and oral presentations, and to be able to follow lectures in the target language. This requires core knowledge of the L2 grammar in the morphosyntax, phonology, semantics, lexicon, text and discourse, and pragmatics areas. But it entails working with academic discourse, which, although close to scientific one, derives from a speech context marked by an asymmetric relationship between the participants. Language teaching for specific purposes starts by analyzing the context needs before designing the course and its materials [4, 17]. We perform this task through two questionnaires for the two languages: one for Slavic speakers learning Italian and Portuguese in their own country and another for immersion learners. Slavic students will learn Academic Italian and Portuguese through OERs and two LMOOCs after the Companion Volume [18] recommendations for the use of educational technologies.

We adopt an educational approach based on metacognition, that is, learning how to learn and learning by doing, based on a multimedia methodology for language learning in computer-assisted academic settings to be used autonomously and with peer collaboration. To mitigate the shortened contact time with the tutor, there will be a structured learning path regarding the timing of activities and assignments, although more versatile than what is usual with xMOOCs.

The design of the LMOOCs followed some proposals of Task Based Learning [19,20], since the modules focus on the performance of a set of tasks of actual language use and the learnings stem from the

learners' work to carry them out. The tasks proposed will develop students' autonomy and the ability to learn how to learn. One of the project's challenges is to diversify language materials and plan significant and motivating tasks to maintain students' participation and interest during the six weeks duration of the MOOC. Another challenge is the self-assessment of the oral production/interaction tasks: we will create instruments that facilitate the learners' autonomy.

2.6 Main outcomes

The main outcomes of the project are expected to be:

- One Italian academic LMOOC consisting of 6 modules each and addressing the specific language needs of Slavic students.

- One Portuguese Academic LMOOC.

- Several Italian academic discourse OERs consisting of audio and video materials and written texts on academic topics related to different disciplinary fields.

- Several Portuguese academic discourse OERs consisting of audio and video materials and written texts on academic topics related to different disciplinary fields.

- One pedagogical Guide for integrating LMOOCs and OERs.

- One Portal for teaching languages with LMOOCs and OERs with the function of an integrated and customizable learning environment to be used by recipients to organize and manage language-learning scenarios based on the OERs.

- Two international, peer-reviewed, scientific conferences on *Language MOOCs and OERs: new trends and challenges*.

- Two edited, peer-reviewed, international volumes containing a selection of the research papers presented on the conferences.

- Dissemination via different tools (brochures, videos, newsletters, social media, papers in national and international journals and conferences).

2.7 Expected results

In close correlation with these results and as part of its development, the project aims the following expected impacts:

- Development of an innovative approach to language for academic contexts.

- Development of quality and open resources for language teaching and learning in an academic mobility context.

- Creation of an integrated and customizable learning environment to be used by recipients to organize and manage language-learning scenarios based on the OER available at the project Portal.

- Promotion of language professionals' network in Europe at different levels.

- Development of quality resources for the training and/or support of thousands of students.

- Promotion of opportunities for successful students' mobility and future job prospects within the main target group.

- Promotion of access to language learning for people potentially excluded or at risk of exclusion for socio-cultural or economic reasons.

- Enhancement of the value of multilingual and multicultural environments, raising awareness about the diversity of European languages.

- Implementation of practices, resources, and tools to improve the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary for creating OERs for language learning.

- Availability of the outputs in an open-source repository beyond the duration of the project.

- Discussion and validation of the findings and outcomes of the project in national and international academic settings.

- Follow-up of the used methodology in other contexts whether similar or different.

3   FINAL REMARKS

The main project objective is to facilitate the integration of Slavic-speaking students in academic mobility, enhancing their ability to function in educational settings and developing their skills of learning how to learn.

In addition, it aims to achieve a significant impact on several levels: At local and regional level: encouraging the inclusion of incoming students with positive outcomes for society and the economy. At national level: to help the development of a multilingual, dynamic workforce with a high level of intercultural competences, able to enter the working world and easily communicate in a foreign language in specific contexts. At European level: supporting student mobility programmes, developing, and enhancing the multilingualism of the citizens, in accordance with European language policies and the requirement to learn at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue. At the international level: through MOOCs, OERs and the project Portal, expanding the target groups exponentially, reaching a global audience. By doing so, the project complies with the European policy for growth and employment, social inclusion, and active citizenship.

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