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How to cite:

Álvarez, Inma (2015). Ethical and aesthetic considerations in language MOOCs. In: Martín-Monje , Elena and Bárcena , Elena eds. Language MOOCs: Providing learning, transcending boundaries. Open Series. Warsaw: De Gruyter, pp. 127–142.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://www.degruyter.com/view/product/455678?format=EBOOK&rskey=H6zLGm&result=6>

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ETHICAL AND AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS IN LANGUAGE MOOCS

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on critical aspects, not usually discussed, in the field of language education. Its main purpose is to examine the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of language education in the context of e-learning, in particular in global learning via MOOCs. The literature on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) has highlighted how the new learning environments and tools have provided great opportunities as well as new challenges for language teaching and learning, but it has been less explicit about how these technologies, virtual environments and modes of computer mediated communication have impacted on the ethics and aesthetics of language education. Here I consider how the context, the content, the medium and the agents involved in education can be approached from an ethical and aesthetic perspective, and the reasons why these considerations are important for our language programmes.

Keywords: ethics, aesthetics, MOOCs, language education, e-learning, intercultural communication

INTRODUCTION

Language learning is mainly about discovering ways to engage in communication with others. It is learning to interact through evolving words, signs and accents in cross-cultural encounters. At present language teaching and learning are dynamic activities which occur in real and virtual worlds. Formal and informal online language education is rapidly moving towards high levels of participation supported by a range of technologies. While much of the attention has been focused on design functionality in order to enhance the learning experience, no mention is made to the “various practical experiences through which aesthetic awareness and ethical expectations are expressed” (Nadin, 2010, p. 111).

In this chapter I will focus on the connections between ethics, aesthetics and language education¹ in the digital era. Firstly, I will consider some of the specific ethical and aesthetics issues that emerge in the various aspects of language education and, in particular, those that arise by using Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Secondly, I will examine the ethical aspirations of the supporters of openness and open initiatives, including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and some of the educational debates around them. Thirdly, I will evaluate the extent to which MOOCs could enhance or inhibit the ethics and aesthetics of language education.

ETHICS AND AESTHETICS IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Ethics and aesthetics permeate all the realms of our lives, including our learning experiences. Ethics is the sphere that reasons about the appropriateness of actions in terms of being right or wrong, and this is connected to specific moral values and actions as well as the issues around them. Traditionally, aesthetics has been concerned with the experience of beauty, the capacity to produce pleasure and the properties of artworks. However, during the 20th century the aesthetic inquiry expanded from philosophy of art to anthropology and sociology shifting our aesthetic thinking towards other artificial and natural domains, emphasising the role of the agent as observer/user in

¹ I will refer here to language education, foreign language education and second language education as meaning the same, i.e. being educated in a language that is not your mother tongue. The concept, as it will be used here, also encapsulates the idea of culture as an intrinsic part of language education.

everyday activities, and embracing a wider range of feelings and experiences, including negative ones.

Ethics and aesthetics are interlinked, both are innate to human beings but, in the main, they require conceptual reasoning. Philosophers have highlighted the fact that aesthetic categories and ideas can raise ethical concerns, and vice versa, that our moral values impact on our aesthetic experiences. An example of how our aesthetic judgement can be influenced by personal beliefs and moral values is that we could find an image morally unacceptable and therefore not being able to enjoy any aspects of what it represents and how it represents it, even if its production required high skills, creativity and artistry.

During the 90s, a few educationists noted how these dimensions have been systematically ignored within the field of Education. Hogan (1998) alerted us to the fact that education policy in Europe had forgotten to refer to moral purposes focusing on performance, markets, excellency and individualism. At the same time, Foshay (1991) complained that “[t]he research literature on aesthetics in education continues to be scarce and generally of mediocre quality” (p. 279). Unfortunately, it is still uncommon to acknowledge and research these aspects of education, particularly issues of aesthetic relevance.

As we will see now, various movements in Education have helped to bring back an ethical dimension to the languages curriculum in the past few decades. However, an aesthetic perspective has not been consolidated in this field despite its tight connections with ethical approaches, morals and values.

The intercultural agenda and beyond

Theories of interculturality in language teaching and learning have contributed not only to the discussion of attitudes, skills, knowledge and political and critical cultural awareness in communicative encounters across cultures (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002), but they have also emphasized the teaching of language as social interaction (Scollon & Scollon, 2000). In addition, they have highlighted the importance of developing a predisposition to deal with the unpredictable situations that come up in our encounters with others, as well as in encounters with our own beliefs and values. The intercultural pedagogical approaches have thus pushed for the explicit development of complex ethical skills with the support of appropriate activities and cultural content in the language classroom.

The connection between education and moral considerations became further strengthened with respect to the people involved with the introduction of widening participation agenda in Europe. This agenda is overall concerned with accessibility, availability, acceptability and affordability of Higher Education. In England, according to the Higher Education Council (2014), it means that there is an explicit commitment to promoting inclusion, equality and diversity through the curriculum on offer, the assessment tasks, the learning experience and our teaching practices. The following words of advice to language teachers illustrate practical approaches to those aims:

All aspects of the plan will need to be underpinned by an understanding of the particular needs of the group and ideally of the linguistic and skills needs of the individuals within it. It should also take account of ethical considerations such as ensuring that no task is threatening to learners, make anyone uncomfortable, has the potential to develop in a direction that would be unwelcome or provoke any sort of hostility or problems for cultural or personal reasons. It should also take into account issues related to disability which arise in the specific mode concerned. Parts of the blend [delivery of courses] may be more accessible to some learners than to others and, where choice is possible, this can be taken into account in deciding which mode to use. (Nicolson, Southgate & Murphy, 2011, p. 97)

Nowadays, being ethical from a language educator perspective means being aware of a range of abilities, recognising different sets of values, encouraging moral reasoning, questioning practices as well as acknowledging and representing linguistic and cultural variation. This also applies to the educational content, context and medium because what is taught, where and when is taught and how is taught needs to reflect those ethical practices and values. The implications are, however, different for the learner community; for them, ethical issues relate mainly to the responsibility and authenticity of their participation, their work and their interaction in their studies. For instance, Higher Education is today sensitive to issues around academic misconduct and plagiarism which relate to students’

academic honesty around other people's and their own creative contributions. Therefore, all those aspects of education —the content, the context, the medium and the agents— are subject to ethical considerations which, inevitably, will refer back to other remote agents who shaped them, that is, book writers and editors, policy makers, ICT designers, etc.

Having noted some ethical aspects related to foreign language education, we can proceed to ask: what would count as an aesthetic perspective in this field?

Languages and aesthetic sensibilities

At one level, an aesthetic view in language teaching and learning would imply the use of a pedagogical approach that focuses on the development of both an emotional and reasoned response to the qualities of languages. The approach would foster the appreciation of the language of study in its diverse registers and varieties based on a set of criteria (e.g. value, beauty, usefulness, efficiency) in a range of historical and creative contexts. The content of language education could be reshaped not only as an aesthetic way of knowing and judging but also as an aesthetic way of interacting with and adapting to other ways of being and behaving.

From a cognitivist stance, the aforementioned intercultural perspective in the theory of language learning has noted that enculturation processes impact on our aesthetic concepts. This view claims that “[p]art of what's involved in speaking aesthetically is to belong to a cultural practice of making sense of things aesthetically. And it is within a socio-linguistic community, along with that community's practices, that such aesthetic sense can be made intelligible” (Croom, 2012, p. 114). I would argue that by engaging learners in language interaction in diverse contexts, modes and environments, language programmes could focus on the pleasure of cultural transformations, the joys that come from knowing about others and about ourselves, the development of critical senses, and the beauty and value of languages and their communities. Moreover, all these aesthetic approaches to languages would clearly stretch to the realm of ethics.

Some of John Macmurray's ideas on education come to mind. Macmurray (2012) has explained that the cultivation of our sensibility and emotions means treating our senses rather than as means as “ends in themselves” (p.671), and being able to enjoy what we perceive around us through emotional reflection. He pleads for an educational system based on “learning to be human”. This humanistic approach is key to the field of Languages because it is based on human perception, communication and interaction. Macmurray (2012) believes, on the one hand, that “our ability to enter into fully personal relations with others is the measure of our humanity” (p. 670), on the other hand, he argues for “learning to live in our senses”, thus establishing a direct connection between our ethical and aesthetic development. In the context of formal education, this agenda could be translated as follows. Language students could be offered an education that makes them aware of how language choices reveal moral and aesthetic perspectives, or how successful social interaction with others depends on their behaviour. Awareness should be emphasised not only on the role of their linguistic skills but also on their cultural attitudes and values. In fact, language education could go beyond awareness and reflection of identity formation and the impact of culture by building on students' perceptions and knowledge of the world, as well as their interpersonal intercultural skills.

CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Nowadays when we talk about education, it is inevitable to refer to ICT which mediates new ways of learning inside and outside the classroom. It has been suggested that this situation has created different types of interactivity, and hence meaning, between teachers, students and the content of their programmes via the World Wide Web (Figure 1).

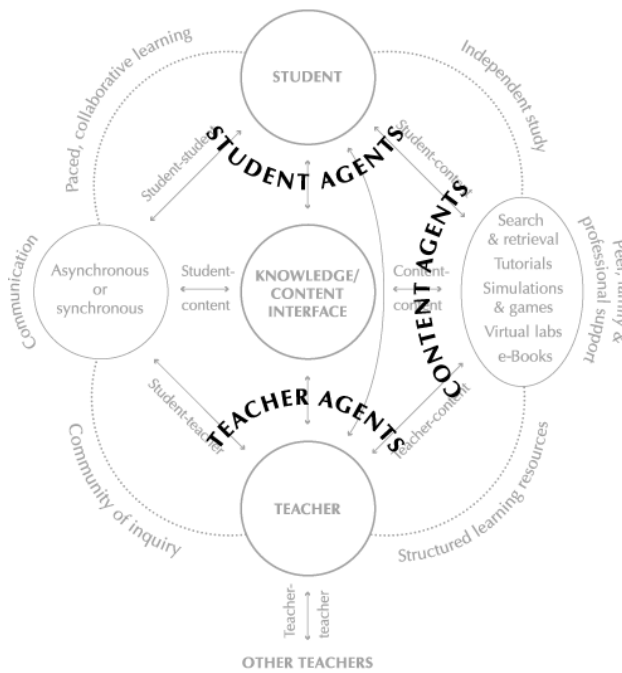


Figure 1. Educational interactions on the Semantic Web (Anderson, 2004)

Thus, internet based education, whether synchronous or asynchronous, collaborative or independent, adds another qualitative layer to the context, content, medium and people involved in teaching and learning because it presents a unique and evolving context for agent interaction. This, in turn, shapes that context and creates new ones. I am particularly interested in the fact that technologies and their designs are not neutral; they embed human, cultural and social values (Manders-Huits, 2011; Tripathy, 2010), and are utilised with those kinds of values by all of us. I propose we should pay attention to the ethical and aesthetic dimensions that come within the rich virtual environments, communication tools, simulations, games, social media and digital objects, but also to those that teachers and learners create or encounter, use and share in online interaction. E-learning brings up particular issues not only of design and communication but also of instructional ethics and aesthetics. It is my contention, however, that we should not limit ourselves to theoretical debates but we should also integrate explicitly critical ethical and aesthetic perspectives in the language curriculum. In fact, these perspectives could be easily linked to current educational trends that advice language students' development of digital literacy, professional skills, and interculturality.

New ethical and aesthetic considerations

I will start considering some of the specific ethical issues that the literature has mentioned with respect to the use of ICT. These issues range from users' behaviour online to specific value aspects of the technological design.

Although a few years ago there were complains about the lack of research on ethics in online education (Brown, 2008; Wang & Heffernan, 2010), attention to computer and information ethics has been growing rapidly. A computer code of ethics guides people about being and behaving morally responsible in specific virtual environments. In particular, in the context of e-learning, Khan (2005) enumerated eight ethical considerations: social and political influence, cultural diversity, bias, geographical diversity, learner diversity, digital divide, etiquette, and legal issues (Khan, 2005, p. 15). In reality, all these considerations are not exclusive of e-learning, but they also apply to the ethics of learning in general, with the exception of the digital divide which I will discuss later. It is true, however, that, in the context of e-learning, they are inevitably framed in slightly different terms; for instance, in e-learning, netiquette, or network etiquette, focuses on defining a set of social rules or norms on how to behave appropriately in online communication. These norms are naturally based on conventions used for face to face encounters but, in addition, they consider the reasons why humans might feel inclined to behave differently (well or badly) when there is a distance between the exchanging agents. Also, with respect to cultural and learner diversity, it has been pointed out that

online learning presents specific ethical challenges to teachers such as the difficulties that arise in the absence of body language and other paralinguistic clues: “student preconditions and cultural prerequisites are often more difficult in an online learning context, because teachers are less able to interact transparently with students” (Anderson, 2004).

Other general ethical discussions have centred around the moral values hidden in technology design and the impact that design choices have on our lives (Verbeek, 2006). For instance, Manders-Huits (2011) has spoken on the importance of attempting Value-Sensitive Design, which considers human and moral values around the technological products and people who would be involved with them. She argues that “[a] technology that is introduced in two or more cultures with different conceptions of a value affects the moral emotions regarding the technology, including its uses and consequences, in different ways” (Manders-Huits, 2011, p. 282). For education, this means that teachers and learners’ emotional responses to technology are directly linked to their cultural background and, therefore, it needs to be taken into account in the ways we design educational technology.

Let’s now move on to consider some aesthetic concerns that new technologies bring to education. A decade ago, Tractinsky (2004) suggested that the study of aesthetics in relation to technology is important for a number of reasons: it enhances the users’ experience of IT, there is strong evidence about the immediacy of our first aesthetic impression of an experience, it gives us attention to pleasure which has intrinsic human value, and also because the more aesthetically aware people become, the greater their need for aesthetics (Tractinsky, 2004). Mentions in the literature of an aesthetic dimension in technology are so far predominantly of a pragmatic nature. Scholars like Cocchiarella (2012) have indicated that, unfortunately, current discourses about technologies concentrate “more on technical facts than on aesthetics or philosophical values” (p. 1). The scarce interest has come from businesses who have been indeed interested in design aesthetics. This branch of aesthetic thinking examines the usefulness, attractiveness and ease of use of a website or software, aspects that are crucial to build trust from customers (Li & Yeh, 2010). Although these aspects could also be relevant for educational design, in our context, it is not only of interest the interaction between an individual and the technology, but also the aesthetic processes that take place online between the three agents previously mentioned: students, teachers and content.

Languages in e-learning environments

The ethical and aesthetic significance of ICT in our field concerns how the educational system applies those technologies for educating language learners in ways that contribute to the development of their attitudes and sensibilities. This is related, for instance, to aesthetic engagement and appreciation of the concealed qualities or patterns of the learning content (languages, cultures and products) within the medium of ICT, and the aesthetic and ethical criteria for judging that content, but it also concerns how the use of ICT for language teaching leads educators to rethink their attitudes and sensibilities as well. Attention to these factors forces ultimately the reconfiguration of roles, expectations and cultural repertoires.

Language learning research has been quite alert in particular to ethical implications of the use of innovative technologies. Researchers in the field of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) have asked and examined contextual questions such as:

what are the major ethical issues in current CALL settings? What are the perceptions of CALL teachers and learners towards ethical issues such as privacy and online security? What are their ethical concerns in online language learning? What are the ideal solutions to the ethical problems for teachers in CALL practice? (Wang & Heffernan, 2010, p. 797)

Others have reflected on the ethical and aesthetic potential of the emerging social relations via new communication technologies. Cimini and Burr (2012), inspired by the theories of Jürgen Habermas and Mikhail Bakhtin, have pointed out the emancipatory potential of open online deliberations which are different to other conventional face-to-face methods. They explain that the electronic interface facilitates the manipulation of virtual personae and lead to “relatively more self-aggrandizing behaviours and deliberately provocative methods of argumentation” (p. 59), a moral inclination very much criticised by many with respect to online interaction. However, they also argue that these irrational discursive behaviours, plagued with emotions and personal bias, are not necessarily problematic. On the contrary, they suggest that these factors could, in fact, get articulated in linguistic

exchanges that help a common social construction of meanings and knowledge among very different agents. In this context they have referred to an emergent “aesthetic for democracy”. Such an aesthetic would be a “model for egalitarian social relations that is open, is inclusive, and takes strength from, or strives toward, universalism” (Cimini & Burr, 2012, p. 153). Therefore, an aesthetic that touches onto the ethical.

These ideas about the ethical and aesthetic possibilities afforded by virtual contexts and mediums clearly connect with the ethical principles of the widening participation initiative for Education. They also support, as will be seen now, the ethical agenda of the open initiatives which have been revolutionising the educational landscape in the past few years.

OPENNESS AND OPEN INITIATIVES’ ETHICAL AGENDA

The concepts of openness and open initiatives in relation to language education, on the one hand, refer implicitly to e-learning, that is, education through new technologies, and on the other hand, have an explicit ethical purpose.

Opening to a hyperdemocracy

The concept of “openness” has a strong social significance linked to the concept of “hyperdemocracy”, which means sharing, participating and cooperating at a global scale:

The concept of ‘Openness’ is based on the idea that knowledge should be disseminated and shared freely through the Internet for the benefit of society as a whole. The two most important aspects of openness are free availability and as few restrictions as possible on the use of the resource, whether technical, legal or price barriers (Yuan, MacNeill, & Kraan, 2009, p. 1)

Openness marks the will to reach wide to anyone who can be potentially reached. Therefore it encapsulates an ethical dimension connected to ideas of social justice, human rights, freedom and accessibility.

Open initiatives

The open initiatives phenomenon has taken off at great speed in the past couple of decades. It has been facilitated and supported since the late 1990s by the development of the new technologies which have revolutionised the way we function and communicate in the world. In fact, as early as 1983, the über-hacker, Richard Stallman, conceived the idea of copyleft (identifying it with the reverse symbol of copyright) and drafted the General Public License which would facilitate legal distribution, reproduction and adaptation of a work. Stallman (1998) declared moral mission in his actions: “My work on free software is motivated by an idealistic goal: spreading freedom and cooperation. I want to encourage free software to spread, replacing proprietary software that forbids cooperation, and thus make our society better” (p. 93). This disruptive practice represented a revolutionary step in modern concepts of creation and authorship which would have enormous implications for the various open practices that followed around the world.

Currently, open initiatives are a set of evolving practices embracing the concept of openness and encouraging the use of open licenses such as Creative Commons Licenses; therefore, they are motivated by an ethical agenda of sharing principles. These principles include the Open Source initiative that promotes the free publication of software source code, the Open Content initiative together with the philosophy of Open Education Practices that have inspired the production and sharing of Open Educational Resources, the move towards Open translation practices as well as the offering of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and the Open Access initiative which has pushed for Open-access publishing of scholarly and academic work.

I will focus next on the specific debates around MOOCs.

Addressing the global masses

MOOCs are free online courses open to all that have been described as platforms (Siemens, 2012), events (Cornier, 2010), textbooks (Finegold cited in Young, 2013) and disruptive innovations (Bayne & Ross, 2014; Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012; Yuan & Powell, 2013). An important aspect of MOOCs

is that they have not been born of institutional policies but rather of the initiatives of institutions and individuals wired to the open initiatives:

The original aim of MOOCs was to open up education and provide free access to university level education for as many students as possible [...] The development of MOOCs is rooted within the ideals of openness in education, that knowledge should be shared freely, and the desire to learn should be met without demographic, economic, and geographical constraints. (Yuan & Powell, 2013, p. 6).

These initial aspirations reflect a utilitarian approach in their wish to maximise the social impact of education. Others have indicated the importance of MOOCs for “empowering people to develop and create their own learning” (Downes, 2012), thus emphasising what it is known as a learner-centred approach to education. However, these ideals are not free from ethical dangers. A number of problems have already been identified in the recent literature around MOOCs. These include, as we will now see, the use of MOOCs for commercial interests, the issue of the digital divide in terms of access to technology but also with respect to the level of digital literacy, as well as the linguistic and cultural challenges of addressing the world population.

Firstly, the progressive transformation of higher education institutions into commercial enterprises has affected the original intentions behind the launching of MOOCs. Universities’ MOOC efforts have started to focus on the promotion of their institutional brands. In addition, interest has been building up with respect to financially viable and optimal business models that justify the use of MOOCs for ultimately profitable gains. This has led to two main commercial actions. On the one hand, free MOOCs have started to be employed as marketing tools in order to drive university recruitment at an international scale. Meanwhile, on the other hand, new fee-based models of MOOCs for accreditation via formal assessment have been born. These steps are gradually changing the initial ethical agenda of MOOCs.

Secondly, the fact that open initiatives are inevitably mediated by technology immediately places them in the conflict of the digital divide. A few voices have argued that what MOOCs will not do is address the challenge of expanding higher education in the developing world (Bartholet, 2013; Bates, 2012). In many places around the globe, the technology is simply not there, neither in the society nor in the formal educational context. It is obvious that engagement with open practices requires access to the technology, and depending on what you wish or need to do for your course, it also requires knowledge on how to create digital resources and share your work. Hence, debates around the digital divide should not only refer to access to new technologies but also to users’ level of digital literacy. At present, participation in these initiatives becomes problematic for the great majority of people in the world as they assume digital literacy from the participants, not only in developing countries but also for people in the developed world. Lack of digital skills can have an impact not only on students’ participation but also on how well they are able to apply relevant academic norms. For instance, cheating is one ethical issue highlighted around student behaviour in MOOCs (Meyer & Zhu, 2013). However, some degree of digital literacy comes with access to the technology and opportunities to immerse oneself in a digital world where one can practise complex skills navigating and interacting online. To this respect, McAuley et al. (2010) have suggested that, in fact, MOOCs can potentially support people’s development of “relevant digital economy literacies in a fast capital-mentored-learning environment” (p. 33). Indeed, one could see how MOOCs, among all the possible virtual learning spaces, offer world learners a kind of sandpit for testing, experimenting and peer-support within a shared knowledge area. Thus, it could be argued that through digital autonomous and participatory practices, MOOCs potentially offer opportunities for the development of digital literacy.

Thirdly, another point worth highlighting is that education in mass at a global scale via MOOCs is confronted with similar ethical challenges as the internationalization of universities, that is, issues of language and cultural differences, and in relation to these, issues related to expectations. For Harri (2009) there are two major language and culture related issues we cannot ignore. On the one hand, she denounces the global imposition of English as the technical vehicle of education, and on the other hand, the monolingualism of the political discourse which refers to “a blindness to difference, to what is other and to what is incommensurable” (p. 226). Indeed, the large MOOC platform providers have been repeatedly accused of claiming superior knowledge and of not contemplating the cultural challenges in their educational models, therefore practising yet another form of cultural imperialism

(Beasley-Murray, 2013; Portmess, 2013). There have also been specific warnings about the fact that in different parts of the world the ethical standards of learning behaviour online are not the same (Wang & Heffernan, 2010). The challenge here is that educators aiming globally should be aware of the linguistic and cultural difficulties that arise from addressing a diverse student population in open online education.

By contrast, no in-depth references have been made with respect to an aesthetic approach to MOOCs. We know that we have an innate readiness for aesthetic sensory experiences of the world which is subsequently shaped by cultural knowledge and values. These aesthetic frames of reference influence our experiences of the educational context, medium, content and agents. Aesthetic discourses around MOOCs would focus on issues such as MOOC platforms' design aesthetics, enjoyment of democratic interactive processes, and appreciation of subject content.

A key question is about the real extent of the realisation of universality and whether successful massive learning is possible at all. That would presuppose that some level of ethics and aesthetic approaches are sharable, or at least negotiable. To this regard, not enough debate has taken place yet. Grover et al. (2013) have indicated that one aspiration should be to figure out MOOCs that cater for a large number of diverse participants, but others have argued that open content cannot be simply offered in one form. They suggest that it needs to be localised and translated and, in fact, that language MOOCs themselves could be a means to make people aware of this need and achieve it in the end (Beaven et al., 2013).

To sum up, reaching out potentially to anyone around the world demands educational development and practices that attend to diverse moral and aesthetic values with respect to the content and medium. For these reason, in the context of massive education online, we need to devise solutions that help us overcome these issues, which not only threaten the ethical democratic aspiration of openness but also the appropriate appreciation and exchange of diverse aesthetic values.

LANGUAGING IN MOOCS

As it has been emphasised so far, many design, contextual, instructional, and interactive aspects of online language education are subject to moral and aesthetic evaluations and influences but not much attention has been focused on them. If these dimensions are to be integrated, designers and teachers of language MOOCs need the support of educational theories as well as specific findings from empirical research. The platform design, curriculum and instruction in language MOOCs could aim at making this visible in ways that fulfil some of the most crucial learning objectives of language education today.

To date, only a handful of language MOOCs have been offered, and most of them focus on the development of a basic level of the target language. Language education could take advantage of the global scale of MOOCs as an opportunity to move away from conceptions of language learning as a simple acquisition of skills and aim to explore a range of human values and fundamental principles of intercultural relations. MOOCs could be seen as a unique platform to foster what Phipps and González (2004) have called "linguaging," that is, a practice of languages that embraces reflective approaches, intercultural understanding and diverse values. Linguaging refers to a self-changing experience of embodied knowledge and creative social interaction. Theirs is an invitation to reframe language education and focus on students' embodiment and engagement with words and cultures. As they explain, "[t]hrough linguaging they become active agents in creating their human and material environments" (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004, p. 167). These thoughts on language learning before the explosion of massive education can be linked to discourses around communities of practice which emphasise the social aspect of linguaging experiences. They provide an inspiring model of "learning citizenship" which is about ethical investment of our identity in social systems (Wenger, 2012, p. 14).

These theories coincide with MOOC initiatives in that they both move education away from models of external control and arbitration of achievement. They propose the decentralisation of the traditional educative control in order to facilitate active and creative participation of agents around the globe in the shaping of new contexts. MOOCs are not in themselves teaching methods nor are they simply self-learning environments. They are localised educational spaces, culture-based platforms, which allow multiple creative and reflective processes, both personal and social. In MOOCs, pedagogy is emergent from the dynamics between the context, the content, the people and the

medium, rather than something that is simply embedded in the technical build (Bayne & Ross, 2014). Language MOOCs, in particular, could aim at facilitating positive engagement among participants in the articulation and embodiment of real and virtual linguistic and cultural meanings.

CONCLUSIONS: RESEARCHING FOR THE FUTURE

It has been my contention here that language education would benefit from the study of ethical and aesthetic aspects that are still unexplored. These aspects are of particular relevance in the context of current innovative global education online.

As MOOCs are an extremely new educational phenomenon, there are very limited theoretical reflections and empirical studies on their nature, aims, effectiveness, accessibility, and so forth. It is also still the case that most investigations to date on actual MOOCs come from the designers or teachers who have been in charge of delivering them. The scarce research literature on MOOCs has been either focusing on reporting on basic design and content, and student attrition and participation, or on limited theoretical aspects of the pedagogical approach, the quality of the content, the financial models and implications, and the technology involved. In addition, latest research has increasingly focused on the importance of constructing new models of research ethics that look into practices of research decisions and data collection with respect to online learning contexts. A review of the literature from 2008 to 2011 indicates eight main emerging themes covered by published articles during that period: agency, connectivism, actor network theory, dangers, learner experience, pedagogies, technology, and trends (Liyanagunawardena, Adams, & Williams, 2013). It is evident that studies on many of the multiple aspects involved in learning via MOOCs have not taken place yet. The most recent report from the Higher Education Academy on MOOCs has highlighted, for instance, that teachers' approaches and reasons for teaching a MOOC are varied and under researched (Bayne & Ross, 2014). As it has been noted here, similarly, the range of and connexions between ethical and aesthetic issues with respect to language MOOCs is another area that could be further researched in the future. The next few years will be crucial for experimenting with MOOCs. Studies around these experiences should lead to new insights about the potential and the challenges of teaching and learning languages massively at a global scale.

Research in the areas proposed in this chapter will aim at understanding how we can support massive online language education with appropriate digital designs, methods and content that are accessible, representative, safe, meaningful, and motivating. If we achieve all these, MOOCs will be adding a huge value to global language education in the 21st century.

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