

Christine Pleines

Peer correction in a massive open online language-learning course

Transcript

Okay, I'm Christine Pleines and um I'm a lecturer in German at the School of Languages and Applied Linguistics at the Open University.

Our project was called 'Engaging learners in a language MOOC'. So, it initially arose from a teaching project and we were asked to set up a suite of four massive open online courses for German with a vocational focus for learners' prior knowledge of the language, and this was funded by the European Social Fund and I worked on producing the materials for those courses with some Associate Lecturers who were also teaching on our Open University modules.

And once the courses were up and running, we were also the educators on these MOOCs, so we then felt that we really this was a new type of course for us and that we really wanted to evaluate what was happening. We came up with this idea that really what we'd be interested in investigating would be peer corrective feedback. This corrective feedback is a huge field in second language learning. I mean there is an enormous number of studies and also in peer corrective feedback, but they're mostly classroom based. So, we kind of brought together these two literatures - on the one hand the sort of engagement with MOOCs literature and on the other hand these sort of more classroom-based studies into peer corrective feedback.

So, I was involved with three Associate Lecturers, so they are Susannah Winchester, Elizabeth Clifford and Hilary Thomas and that collaboration worked really, really well. We had a lot of different data. So, we had learner analytic data to start with, we knew how many learners and we knew how many of them engaged and how many engagement activities, how many actually actively posted in forums. So, we had all that learner analytic data. Then we also had from Future Learn - they always run a pre-course and a post-course survey so we had survey data from their survey. We also added some of our own questions to the post-course survey although at the end it was actually the Future Learn pre-course survey which gave us the most relevant data, which we included in our study.

And then we also did some qualitative work um very much focused on our question, you know on peer corrective feedback. So we analyzed all the instances of peer corrective feedback; we went back to the forums - that was a big job - and we found the instances of peer corrective feedback and we collected them and we categorized them. And then we also ran focus groups - again, this course being so big being a big advantage, so we managed to actually run six focus groups and we asked general questions how learners engaged with the MOOCs, but also our specific questions on learner attitudes to peer corrective feedback.

So yes, the exciting thing for us was sort of all the tensions really we uncovered. So, already from the Future Learn pre-course survey, it asks this question, it gets learners to say, 'What are you expecting? Are you expecting to learn from others?' And 50 percent of learners said yes, we're expecting to learn from others and it also asks are you expecting to share your own expertise and only fifteen percent said they're expecting to share their own expertise, so there is already this discrepancy. Yes, they want to learn from others but they don't really think they want to share their own expertise and that's then something which came out in exactly that way also from our focus groups, that when we asked people about peer corrective feedback, peer feedback, they were quite willing, you know 'cautiously positive' we mostly called it that to have feedback from their peers, they were quite willing, but they

were not willing to give feedback themselves and they were very, very negative about the idea of themselves giving feedback.

I think it's a little bit early to determine the impact of the project. So, we've disseminated the project and we went for example we went to Eurocall, which is a big conference, and we took the project there and one of my colleagues Hilary presented the project there to a very interested audience and lots of positive feedback. We then also attended the MOOC special interest group, so I think we put peer corrective feedback on the agenda of the MOOC research groups. It's something that hadn't been researched before, so it's something we managed to put on the agenda there. And we also published our conference contribution as a short paper and of course, when we ran our own MOOC again we were then very aware of the things we had found out from our studies and we started experimenting a little bit with how we're going to steer this process of peer corrective feedback.

But also, you know, I felt I joined the sort of joined the MOOC research community. I've done research in language learning and teaching before, but not specifically into MOOCs, so I joined kind of a new community and also that for example we presented at the conference and that, I think, got us involved in more things because then we published actual paper, then they asked us to peer review other papers, so that got us involved in more research.