Open Translation - a massive open online course
Tita Beaven, The Open University

Summary
This project brought together two disruptive innovations to evaluate their affordances for teaching and learning. The project set up, ran and evaluated a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) on Open Translation practices. MOOCs are free online courses, open to all, connecting large numbers of distributed learners in a participatory way. Open translation initiatives use crowd-sourcing for translating open resources (TED talks, Wikipedia articles), or global blogging and citizen media projects (Global Voices). They can be used to teach learners translation skills, useful in a range of academic disciplines and professional settings and important for employability in a globalised world.

The course attracted 300 participants from the UK and beyond who took part in the MOOC at a distance using a range of online tools. This enabled them to work with others from different countries and cultures, and to experience a plurilingual and intercultural environment, potentially useful in any future professional activities in a global context. The course website also attracted a much wider interest, with more than 44,000 page views. The course website is available at: [http://labspace.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?name=OT12](http://labspace.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?name=OT12) [Accessed December 2013]

The project:
- introduced learners to open translation tools and generic translation skills, developing useful employability skills in a global context;
- promoted plurilingualism and intercultural communication;
- promoted internationalisation of the student experience;
- engaged participants in real-world translation tasks as volunteer translators and introduced participants to community translation projects (e.g. Wikipedia, TED talks, Global Voices);
- developed and disseminated expertise in developing and running Massive Online Open Courses in the Humanities, and of the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) and Practices;
- created Open Educational Resources for teaching non-specialist open translation skills, available here: [http://humbox.ac.uk/group/16](http://humbox.ac.uk/group/16). [Accessed December 2013] The resources are published under a Creative Commons licence, thus increasing the reach and impact beyond the Open University.

Aims and objectives
- To explore MOOCs and Open Translation tools and practices and evaluate their affordances for teaching and learning in the academic area.
- To make the resources developed available to others for use and reuse under a Creative Commons licence.
- To disseminate the project and our findings to the academic community and beyond.

Approach
This project developed a model for a MOOC in Open Translation, and subsequently trialled and evaluated it. The course was free and open to any learner with native or near native command of English and with a good command of another language (equivalent to B2 or above of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, CEFR), or vice versa. Originally we had planned the course for participants with English/Spanish but, as soon as the MOOC started, we realised participants with other
language pairs (especially English/ Brazilian Portuguese and English/French) also wanted to take part, so we adapted the course to suit their needs.

Methodology:
In terms of student engagement, one of our main achievements was that we were able to respond very quickly and flexibly to a different participant profile from that anticipated, realising as soon as the MOOC started that we needed to accommodate participants with language pairs other than those we could support. We made this clear and, in fact, the Brazilian Portuguese contingent, a language in which we had no expertise, supported themselves very well.

The evaluation was designed to:
- generate an understanding of the OT12 MOOC participants: their motivation, aspirations, and attitudes to self-regulated and collaborative learning;
- explore site-specific features of the OT12 MOOC;
- gain an insight into the use of open translation and captioning tools.


Lessons learned:
- For participants to be able to have a successful MOOC experience, they need to have an amount of self-determination and participatory literacy skills. If MOOCs are indeed going to be a game changer in making education accessible for all, we need to ensure that we enable and widen access by providing participants with the opportunities to develop their participatory literacy skills, perhaps prior to taking part in MOOCs.
- We believe that language is one of the main barriers to the use and reuse of OER, and that translation and localization of OER is a way to facilitate use and reuse. What remains to be worked on is how to achieve this in sustainable, culturally aware ways.
- At the start of the project there were a number of bureaucratic problems affecting receipt of funding. This severely delayed our planning and had an impact on our schedule. We were not able to produce the content of the MOOC as far in advance as we had hoped and we were still producing the content of the MOOC once the MOOC had started. Although this was a little stressful at times, it also enabled us to be more responsive to the interests and needs of the learners. So, for instance, although we had originally only planned to deal with English/Spanish translations, we were able to set up groups of other language pairs (English/French, English/Portuguese) in response to the learners’ interests. However, it did mean that we were not able to run the focus groups as planned, hence a revision to our evaluation strategy, with the addition of a follow-up evaluation six months after the MOOC.

Outputs
The OT12 MOOC and all the resources used are still available, although the forums are now closed. The MOOC is available at: http://labspace.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?name=OT12 [Accessed December 2013]

We have also produced a published a series of open educational resources on Open Translation in Humbox, an OER repository for the Humanities, available at: http://humbox.ac.uk/group/16 [Accessed December 2013].
We are keen to make any outputs available to others, and have put all relevant information on our project webpage at: http://www.ot12.org/ [Accessed December 2013]

**Impacts**
The OT12 MOOC could not have been better timed as far as the impact within the institution was concerned. When planning OT12, we liaised closely with a group of colleagues from the Institute of Educational Technology who were also planning a MOOC (OLDS MOOC a learning design MOOC), and benefited greatly from some joint discussions about badges and about evaluating the MOOCs. In December 2012, just as our MOOC was finishing, the OU announced the advent of Future Learn, a UK MOOC platform by a consortium of UK Universities and other bodies, and lead by the OU. We have liaised with colleagues working on FutureLearn, shared the expertise we gained through OT12 with them, and given feedback on one of the MOOCs the OU is preparing (a short MOOC on being a peer facilitator.)

We have also driven some of the discussions about MOOCs in our Faculty, and put forward two language proposals for FutureLearn MOOCs. In addition, we are investigating two possible collaborations for two further language MOOCs in the autumn, one with the Institut Français, and one with the UNED, the Spanish distance university. The discussions with the Institut Français have lead to the development of a MOOC for learners of French, Travailler en Francais (https://sites.google.com/site/mooctravaillerenfrancais/) [Accessed January 2014].

In terms of impact, the project has generated quite a bit of interest, which we have captured through web analytics. The project website (OT12.org) had 1,300,000 page views between September and December 2012. Visitors came from more than 200 countries, with 80 countries having more than 1000 visits each.

The MOOC had nearly 300 participants, but many more looked at the resources without actively registering. Indeed, it generated 44,138 page views (of which 27,687 were unique page views).

Finally, in terms of adding to the debate about translating OER, our project has been well received and, after presenting our paper on “Open Translation MOOC: creating online communities to transcend linguistic barriers” at OER13, we have now published it in the Journal of Interactive Media and Education (http://oro.open.ac.uk/39099/) [Accessed January 2014].

**Implications for the student learning experience**
One aspect highlighted by this project is that if MOOCs are conceived as events where individuals can “come along for the ride” and coalesce around a common endeavour (such as doing a joint translation, in our case, or any other user generated knowledge or content), this poses under-explored challenges for learners in terms of their self-determination and participatory literacy skills (Pegrum 2009). Indeed, we found that, in order to operate successfully as members of a MOOC online community, it is almost a prerequisite that learners have the necessary self-determination and participatory literacy skills.

Therefore, in line with Wiley (2012), we ask how "open" MOOCs really are. What happens to those who are not sufficiently self-determined and skilled? Will their lack of participatory literacy skills prevent them from experiencing the MOOCs fully, or indeed, from taking part at all? We need to make sure that learners either come to MOOCs equipped to take part or are informed about what they need to participate successfully, and also where and how they can acquire the skills they need, if necessary. Interestingly, this is something that the Open University is addressing in FutureLearn through a short MOOC on how to learn in a MOOC. This is also the subject of an article “MOOCs: striking the right balance between facilitation and self-determination” currently submitted to the Journal of Open Learning and Teaching.

The other issue we have been reflecting on throughout the project is that of language in OER. Indeed, language can be one of the main barriers to the reuse of OER, so translation and localization might be a way to facilitate reuse. One obvious solution to the considerable effort required to translate OER is to use crowdsourcing, already an established and successful solution to making content more accessible in some large-scale, high-profile open projects such as Wikipedia (Wikipedia Translation) [Accessed December 2013] or TED talks (Ted Open Translation Project) [Accessed December 2013]. As part of our evaluation of OT12
we have analysed participant expectations and outcomes, and are considering the suitability of MOOCs for bringing together distributed communities around a common endeavour, in this instance, the translation of open content.

We firmly agree with 'the simple and powerful idea' that underpins the OER movement: 'that the world's knowledge is a public good, and that technology in general and the web in particular provide an extraordinary opportunity for everyone to share, use and reuse it' (Smith & Casserly, 2006: 8). We also believe that language is one of the big unacknowledged barriers to the adoption of OER, and that the OER movement would greatly enhance its impact by fostering the translation and localisation of OER (and localising is an important aspect, which will help counter the view that OER can also be a form of cultural imperialism). Further work is still needed to find sustainable ways to achieve this, and this issue merits further exploration and support from the Higher Education Academy and others.

We are investigating the possibility of running the MOOC again in future. We have come to see the MOOC as an event enabling people interested in Open Translation to come together and find out about tools and practices, and collaborate on the translation of specific OER.

**References and other resources**

During the MOOC, we used the FLOSS manual Open Translation Tools as a reference book, and found this useful. It is available at: [http://en.flossmanuals.net/open-translation-tools/](http://en.flossmanuals.net/open-translation-tools/) [Accessed December 2013]

We also found a very useful OER on translation, which might be of interest to others working on this area: Translation Studies and Theory: [http://nptel.iitm.ac.in/courses/109104050/](http://nptel.iitm.ac.in/courses/109104050/) [Accessed December 2013]

The literature about MOOCs is rapidly evolving, but these are some of the articles and blog postings we found particularly interesting in our context:

Cormier, D. (2010). *What is a MOOC?* Online at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eW3gMGqcZQc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eW3gMGqcZQc) [Accessed December 2013]


OLNet (2009) ‘**What are the barriers to reusing/remixing OER?**’ [Accessed December 2013]