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BY PUPILS FOR STUDENTS: EXPERIENCE WITH THE MOOC “TENSES EXPLAINED”

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Abstract

Usually, it is the university teachers who develop educational resources for their students. The development procedure presented in this article differs significantly from common processes: Students aged about 15 years (9th grade) were actively involved in the production of videos for a language learning MOOC, which is primarily aimed at university students. The article pursues the question of how and with what effects students were involved in the video production for a language MOOC. We systematically describe the background and processes of the development of the MOOC “Tenses Explained” and the final result. The paper gives insights into the processes and activities of more than 600 participants so far through data from the MOOC platform MooX.at. In addition, the aim is to share the experience in the form of insights in processes as well lessons learned.

Keywords: learning videos, tenses, MOOC, co-design

1. INTRODUCTION

MOOCs are “Massive Open Online Courses” for more than 150 participants (McAuley et al., 2010). MOOCs are referred to as “open” because they are accessible online without formal restrictions, such as a university entrance qualification, and usually free of charge (see McAuley et al., 2010). In particular, the model of so-called “xMOOCs”, which are presentation-oriented online courses for many (cf. Wedekind, 2013), has become widely established: Here, learning videos and material for self-regulated learning are offered in course form and exchange between learners is supported by forums.

In Austria, the iMooX.at platform of the University of Technology of Graz and the University of Graz went online in 2014, committed to offering only open licensed courses (Kopp & Ebner, 2013; Ebner et al., 2016). In this context, “open” in the definition of online course got an additional meaning by offering so-called open educational resources (in short OER, Schaffert & Geser, 2008; UNESCO, 2019). Unlike in the US, where MOOCs are seen by (expensive) universities as a way of wooing potential students (Fischer et al., 2014), the platform iMooX.at has the primary purpose of offering online courses for everyone: All iMooX courses are offered as free and accessible to all, i.e. there are no access restrictions; course participation and certificates are free of charge. The courses are aimed at a broad public and are designed according to the current state of science. The platform is subject to the strict data protection regulations in Austria and the guidelines of Graz University of Technology; the sale of learner data or use for personalised advertising - which is quite common with other MOOC platforms - is therefore excluded.

As all online courses are OER, which is per se a “digital social innovation” (Schön et al., 2017), several innovative co-operations, course designs and re-usages have been developed within the last years. For example, Ebner et al. (2020) described seven didactical variations of MOOC usages within a university lecture. And especially in adult education, iMooX partners implemented several, also award-winning, “inverse blended learning settings” (Schön & Ebner, 2019; Ebner et al., 2017) because of the possibility of the wide variety of situations, in which they can be reused. Co-operations of organisations in the development of courses and their materials are relatively easy to handle concerning intellectual property rights in a joint project if the results have an open licence and can be (literally) used by everyone.

Therefore, a common MOOC as a base for a new lecture in six partner universities for teacher education is a possible result (Ebner & Schön, 2020).

The iMooX platform offers MOOCs from various Austrian universities, within several fields and for several target groups; for pupils, students, teachers, educators, researchers to lifelong learners. Language learners, especially for German as a second language, used one course on online learning for beginners in particular, which was offered several times (cf. a report from Indonesia by Kharis & Syafruddin, 2016). In 2019, the first defined language learning MOOC was offered at the iMooX platform for English learners, called “Tenses Explained”. Before, various other MOOC providers offered language learning MOOCs, for example linguistics MOOCs by the University of Marburg or others (Wittke, 2020; Estebas-Vilaplana & Solans, 2020).

At this point, we would like to focus less on the content of the MOOC and its impact than on its creation: Usually, it is the university teachers who develop educational resources for their students. The development procedure presented in this article differs significantly from common processes: Students aged about 15 years (9th grade) were actively involved in the production of videos for a language learning MOOC, which is primarily aimed at university students.

Therefore, the article follows the following questions to describe a potentially unique case:

- How and with what effects were the students from a school involved in the video production for a language MOOC?
- How was the MOOC received by the university students as well other participants?

The aim of this publication is to share the experience in the form of insights in processes as well as lessons learned.

2. METHODOLOGY

The following research methods are applied to answer the guiding questions. We systematically describe the background and processes of the development of the MOOC “Tenses Explained” and the youth involvement as a sort of **case study**. We therefore used our documentation of the development and processes, for example notes, scripts and e-mails as a base for documentation and did some problem-based interviews with the project leader, who is as well main author, and two students of the school to recapitulate our memories, experiences and assessments. We as well describe the medium-term consequences for the students and the school involved. Additionally, we provide a presentation of the MOOC and an analysis of the participations, using **learning analytics** figures and features. So far, more than 600 participants have registered for the massive open online course “Tenses Explained” which started in May 2020. We also present lessons learnt from all perspectives, including from the participants about the unique method of learning with the help of younger students from school, which was positive.

Finally, our case study and MOOC participation will be critically analysed concerning potentials, challenges and recommendations for imitators. We will also present an outlook on open questions and future work.

3. CO-DEVELOPMENT OF THE “TENSES EXPLAINED” VIDEOS FOR THE MOOC

Fig. 1 gives an overview of the development of the project, the complexity of which could not be foreseen at first and was not planned in this way.

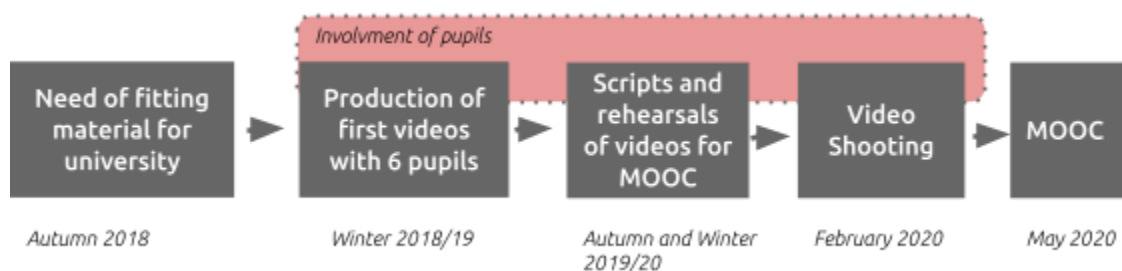


Figure 1: Development of the project and plan over time

Thomas Murr, a teacher who teaches English for students at Graz University of Technology and at a secondary school (BG/BRG Judenburg), is behind the plans outlined. For his university lectures he wanted to give an overview of the English tense continuum. In a conversation with the Educational Technology team at Graz University of Technology, it was discussed that there was nothing suitable for the course or nothing under a suitable licence (Creative Commons). This gave rise to the idea of producing suitable videos and working on them with the students at school. The initial focus was that the videos should not be dry and boring monologues, but lively communication. The video team came up with the idea using the chroma technique, which involves shooting in front of a green screen and later replacing it with virtual, in our case hand-drawn, backgrounds. The first videos were created in this way, the pupils had a lot of fun while shooting them, the students at university, who used the videos, gave good feedback and the idea to produce an entire MOOC on the topic in the same way arose in conversation with the Educational Technology team.

This time, the scenes were rehearsed for longer and developed together with pupils. As the pupils are no English natives and learn English as a second language, good, accurate pronunciation and acting was a challenge which at the same time encouraged their own learning. The less lively and theoretical parts of the videos were spoken by the teacher. The lively, communicative part came exclusively from the students. About 15 samples of one hour each were conducted on different dates.

It was a concern and therefore planned in detail that all participating students have the same number of speaking roles/dialogues and that there are varied conversation constellations for the MOOC participants, and that all persons also become "familiar" because they appear more often (see Fig. 2). Due to the different combinations of roles, it was a bit more difficult to coordinate the rehearsal dates.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
1	Video	Future	Present	Past	Present P	Past P			
2	Harry	1	1	1	1	1			4
3	Paul		1	2	1		1		5
4	Max			2	1	1	1		5
5	Amy	1	1	1			2		5
6	Kate		1	1	1	1	1		5
7	Oliver			1	1	2	1		5
8	Daniel		1		2	1	1		5
9	Anne		1			2	1		4
10									

TITLE:		TENSES EXPLAINED – THE PAST TENSES
DESCRIPTION:		The aim of this video is to show the use of the past tense simple and the past tense progressive. Short dialogues will help to illustrate the use of the individual forms in real-life situations.
#	Visual Content	Narration / Audio
1	Presenter is shown in front of a simple backdrop.	Hello and welcome to tenses explained. Today we're going to have a look at a tense we all use almost every day when we tell a story or talk about our holidays. For those kinds of things, we need the past tense. As with the present tense, the past tense can be divided into two basic forms: the past tense simple

Fig. 2: Planning the roles and scenes and excerpt from a script

The total of 10 students for the first videos and for the later videos for the MOOC are partly involved in both projects. All activities were voluntary and took place outside of school hours, but at school - or during filming at the TU Graz.

The pupils regularly criticised and changed the project leader's drafts of the scripts, and together they tried to develop successful, everyday dialogues, which at the same time had to be clear and correct examples of the grammatical content. The students for example realised that a certain dialogue would not be appropriate for the setting of the video and that they would not greet each other "like this" and more. Spoken words were also replaced by a handshake or other gestures; interjections such as "oh" or "yeah" were also inserted by the pupils.

Appropriate consent forms were signed, also by the parents, for the preparation of the filming and the planned open licences. The **recording** of the videos with the students took place in the video studio of Graz University of Technology with a complete support team under professional conditions. The students got to see all the procedures and processes up close, were wired up, had to be quiet during recordings, and were always trying to improve or better stage something. The video team reported that it was fun to work with the students and that they were impressed by their seriousness and good preparation and discipline in the studio. During the filming, the students were super confident with their lines, which the team also liked much. At first, they were visibly nervous, but the team's treatment of the students as fully-fledged actors quickly gave them back their confidence. A concentrated but relaxed working atmosphere developed. Wiring the microphones and being a professional actor in a professional

studio were exciting for everyone. The post-production of the videos was done by the iMooX team, the MOOC itself was finalised and moderated by the teacher (see Fig. 3).

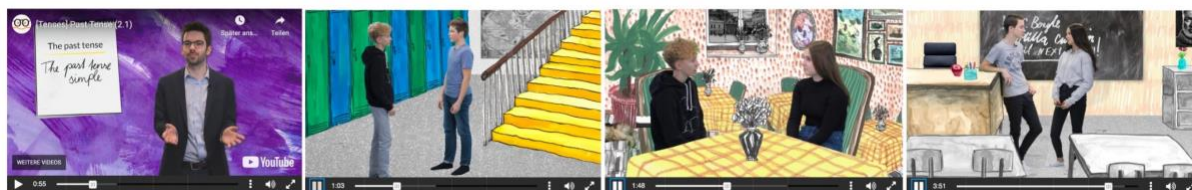


Fig. 3: Screenshots of the video co-produced with students of the 9th grade (about 15 years old) for the MOOC “Tenses Explained”. URL: <https://imoox.at/mooc/course/view.php?id=83> (2020-12-01)

Unfortunately, due to the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic and the associated school closures, the planned presentations of the project and the MOOC, including a press conference, did not take place. However, the school proudly reported about it on the homepage and in the annual report (see Fig. 4) , and there was an exchange about the project, especially among the language teachers.



Fig. 4: Presentation on the school homepage (left; source: screenshot <https://www.brg-judenburg.ac.at/node/1671>, 2021-03-21; and annual report (right, source: BRG Judenburg, Annual Report 2019/2020)

The presentation had to be limited to descriptions in the school's annual report. Of course, this was a little disappointing for the young people involved.

For the students at Graz Technical University, the MOOC came at just the right time because of the lockdown: they had a programme that was tailored specifically to their needs and also got excellent feedback. In addition, it loosened up the first part of the lockdown phase.

4. THE MOOC AND INSIGHTS

The MOOC started in May 2020 and is still available as a self-learning offer (December 2020). The target group, apart from the interested public, is about 300 students/semester at Graz University of Technology (TU Graz) who participate in the university's regular language learning courses, about 25 courses in English every semester. The levels of these courses range from B1 to C1 according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). The MOOC covers the topics of future tense (will / going to), present tense (simple / progressive) past tense (simple / progressive), present perfect tense (simple / progressive) and past perfect tense (simple / progressive). The learning goal is: Participants are able to use the different tenses of English according to the situation. Furthermore, the participants have a basic theoretical knowledge of the English tense continuum.

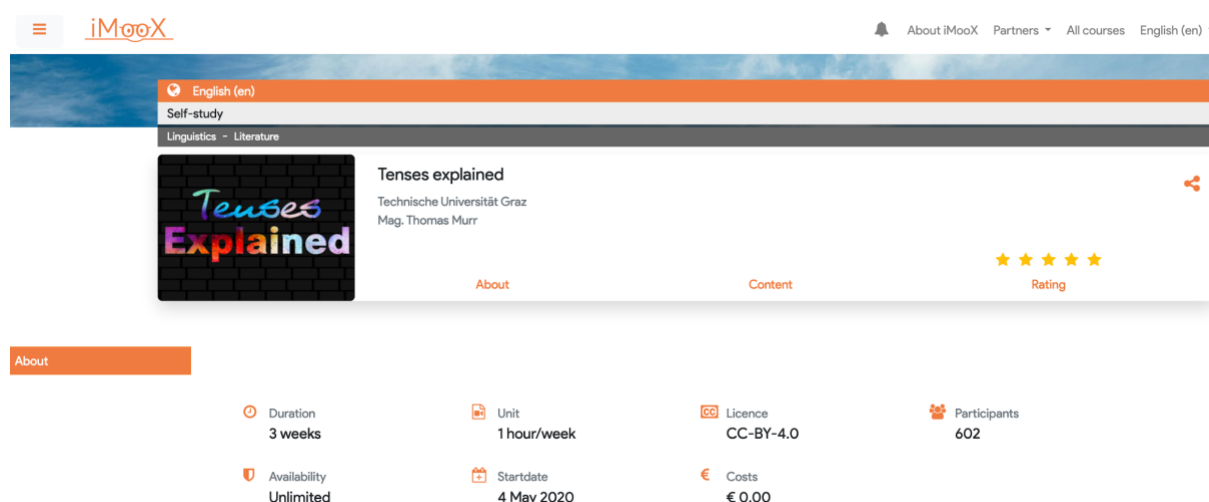


Fig. 5: Screenshot of the MOOC “Tenses Explained”. URL: <https://imoox.at/mooc/course/view.php?id=83> (2021-03-11-1)

The MOOC (see Fig. 5) consists of three units, namely 1. future and present tense, 2. past tense, and 3. present perfect and past perfect. Each unit has at least one video and a quiz. After having answered 75% of the self-assessment questions successfully, participants subsequently get an automatic generated confirmation of participation.

Up until March 2021, more than 600 participants (N=609) registered for the MOOC, where 534 were active (88%, see Table 1). More than half of the active participants have a positive test result (272, so 51%). Participants who have successfully completed all tests are asked for feedback (evaluation sheet) and then have the opportunity to download a certificate of participation. This was done by 194 people. In summary, nearly a third of the registered participants and 36 per cent of the active participants had positive test results, filled out the evaluation sheet and got a certificate for successful MOOC participation.

Table 1: The MOOC “Tenses Explained” in Figures

Activity	Participants
Registered participants in MOOC so far (03/2021)	609
Active participants (at least one activity within the course)	534
Unit 1 (Week 1) quiz successful	272
Unit 2 (Week 2) quiz successful	236
Unit 3 (Week 3) quiz successful	216
Filled out evaluation sheet	203
Certificate for successful MOOC participation	194

5. LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Within our interviews, several learning opportunities and experiences were mentioned. In the following paragraphs, we try to sum up the different perspectives:

For the **students at school**, the involvement within both project phases, but especially as part of the MOOC as video actors, shows a significant boost in language and presentation skills as well self-efficacy. The teacher describes that other teachers have also noticed that the pupils involved - not all of whom already had a good command of English - clearly benefit from the participation. The students and

their teacher said their intonation and pronunciation got better. Second, they are more confident in their presentations to the class, in English and in German. In addition, they all learned about the processes and techniques in a professional video studio, especially the green screen technique, which was previously unknown to them. The teacher also reports that learning the scripts and making appointments should also have promoted the students' ability to organise themselves.

The **teacher** described a deep learning experience through the precise and meticulous selection and development of the language examples for the MOOC. He reported that this also has a lasting effect on his further teaching and developed working materials. When something is made for a MOOC, there is little opportunity for learners to ask questions, so examples and materials must be clear, consistent and short in every case - this is not an easy challenge. He as well said in the interview: "For me, it was also a completely different way of talking about grammar, as you can find vivid, realistic examples. After all, it's a 'living foreign language', so it's supposed to be lively." In addition, the teacher also described the cooperation with the students as instructive and helpful: "They made it clear to me again and again that communication in everyday life does not always happen like in the textbook". Their suggestions for change ultimately led to the lively, vivid dialogues for the MOOC. The teacher also describes the insights into professional video production as enriching and stimulating, especially the video work with teleprompter and notes with equal measure of self-criticism and satisfaction: "I still think I've made it worse and speak a bit robotically and stiffly, however it ensures that everything is also 100% perfect. - Which it has become."

The **students at the university and other learners** who use the MOOC and all other learners benefit from vivid, lively and realistic dialogues in humorous animated environments. The fact that not every pronunciation of every word is 100 percent correct and that the actors are younger than they are adds a certain lightness: students describe it as motivating that younger, also non-native people show what they are supposed to learn and enjoy a fresh setting for language learning videos.

6. CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The situation and settings found - a teacher teaching at a school and university and an organisational unit experienced and open-minded in video production and MOOCs is not common. But what can be said about the challenges? And what recommendations can be given to potential imitators?

Some challenges were mentioned by the teacher and the students:

- That there was no fixed rehearsal date.
- That the effort for the development of the script and the whole MOOC is enormous for the teacher.

The recommendation mentioned was:

- In general, video work and production of videos for teaching should be envisaged as a possibility for English classes or study groups: There is a need for appropriate materials and video production offers learning opportunities.
- Cooperate with a partner who can contribute the expertise that is lacking.
- Involve students as partners and equals, especially during filming.
- Involve students who are from one class or already friends.
- Rehearsals never longer than one hour.
- The teacher would also recommend involving more pupils, e.g. for the different tasks and roles or substitute roles, and thus make the project broader.
- The students have emphasised that it was great that the recordings took place in a professional studio rather than at school.

7. OUTLOOK

The teacher has already planned another project involving students in the development and creation of learning videos in a MOOC. This time the MOOC for students will deal with written communication and short contributions, e. g. emails. How the materials created so far and the MOOC "Tenses Explained" will be further used is still open. However, due to the publication as OER, many scenarios are possible, e. g. a simple repetition, a didactic reuse of the MOOC (Höllerbauer et al., 2017), another variant of exploitation (Geser, Schön & Ebner, 2019) or even other social innovation (Ebner et al., 2016). When

the school students were asked in the interview whether they would be present for another video, they answered as if shot out of a pistol: Yes!

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