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**TRADITIONAL APPROACH VS. INTERACTIVE APPROACH IN
TEACHING FRENCH LITERATURE AT UNIVERSITY**

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Abstract

The actual challenge in Romanian universities is teaching literature, especially those epochs of the literary history that seem to be forgotten and/or distant from our student's points of interest. This challenge is even tougher if the subject is French literature, in a context where Romanian students tend not to consider any longer French as a valid language for every day communication. The aim of our paper is to present our teaching experience, experiments and results in teaching the French Enlightenment Literature to Romanian students, at university, by using MOOCs, new technologies and multimedia tools, together with or as complements of traditional teaching. The main challenges that we have encountered are, first, the poor presence of MOOCs on French literature, then the unsatisfactory level of French language for many of the students, making thus difficult the access to those courses, as well to the audio-video resources; finally the preconceived idea that literature is boring, in no connexion with their actual interests and having no importance in the study of a foreign language. We have experienced all those practices, with our students, during the last year and we have observed that the impact of MOOCs is unsatisfactory, based mainly on the lack of interactivity; on the other hand, the results are satisfactory when using on-line movies, audio books and on-line activities: an increased interest for this part of the literature.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, in a society that tends to increase its speed, the liberty of movement and the pluridisciplinarity, but in quest for its real values, there is an increased need of education, of formation, often in in-formal ways. People need freedom in administrating their time and in scheduling their activities, but they also need education, information, in various domains. Modern, on line courses are at high demand, responding to this obvious need. The aim of our paper is to analyse if the on line courses and other types of video and audio resources are suitable for teaching literature at university, namely the French Enlightenment Literature. We question if there is an educational profit in using them, which are the advantages and the disadvantages, compared to the “traditional” way of teaching.

In our opinion, the study of literature is essential for the acquisition of a foreign language, as this one cannot be dissociated from the mentalities, the cultural practices and the habits of a population, many of them reflected in literature.

2. Problem Statement

University professors from all domains, specialists in education, psychologists, economists, journalists, they all have discussed, during these last years, the benefits and the limitations of MOOCs.

Delbanco (2013) remembers that even if universities or university professors had founded the biggest MOOCs providers, these one have been received with certain scepticism. He cites Joseph Harris, a writing professor at Duke University, who said “I don’t see how a MOOC can be much more than a digitised textbook” (para.3).

The sociologist Hilary Graham, resumes clearly the benefits and the target of MOOCs, stating that, even if they are not “for everyone”, they are still useful for persons who want “to learn about a particular topic without committing to completion of coursework” (Hill, 2017, p. 562). Bogost, Schroeder, Davidson, and Filreis, (2013) appreciates the massive character of MOOCs, which respond to the needs of a society where the use of MOOCs prevents from exclusion, affirming, “It is in this context that I find MOOCs useful good towards educational experimentation that may lead to methods for educating more students and in way more responsive to the connected world they inhabit everywhere except in school” (Bogost, Schroeder, Davidson, & Filreis, 2013, Davidson, para 3). Meanwhile, Ray Schroeder (Bogost, Schroeder, Davidson, & Filreis, 2013) thinks that MOOCs respond to the imperative of the economy, where there is a need for the globalisation of the learning experience.

In the same time, we have to stress that teaching literature is more than giving historical information about the authors’ lives and careers, more than presenting general information about the literary epoch and the main stylistically characteristics of one’s writing. Teaching literature supposes a constant and vivid *in presentia* communication between the teacher and the students, in order to form their analytical and critical capacities. Free and imaginative interpretations of literary texts, as well as correlations between texts or texts and social/historical/cultural facts cannot be imagined in a depersonalised context, with no direct and human approach.

Hanal (2013), for instance, underlines that the presence of the teacher is crucial for literature classes, stating, “Writing and literature classes, even those offered in a low-residency format, especially benefit from a teacher’s presence, someone who can offer feedback and assessment on creative work and critical

analysis” (p. 16). Hanal’s idea encounters that of Al Filreis (Bogost, Schroeder, Davidson, & Filreis, 2013), who stresses that the use of technology needs not to be impersonal. Ian Bogost also offers a critical vision of MOOCs, which he considers an instrument that responds to financial, economic, marketing, even entertainment purposes: “The fact that MOOCs proponents have even toyed with the idea of hiring actors to present video lectures only underscores the degree to which MOOCs aspire to reinvent education as entertainment” (Bogost, Schroeder, Davidson, & Filreis, 2013, Bogost, para.8).

In the same direction, Roland Greene writes “Much of the concern for MOOCs as a sign of the future comes out of the interpretative humanities and social sciences, where online instructions on a large scale is likely not germinal to the future” (Greene, 2013, para 2). Green also remembers that the biggest providers of MOOCs – Coursera, Udacity, Edx – started, together with the platforms, a real propaganda for those classes, while the critical discourse at this respect appeared “tardily and against the trend of a rush of uncritical thinking” (Greene, 2013, para 2).

3. Research Questions

It seems clear for us that, far from being useless or scientifically inadequate, MOOCs are limited to some domains or scientific areas, being less adequate for the artistic and creative domains, which are widely based on interactivity and creativity. The liberty, also preached by all MOOCs providers, is also questionable, in the case of literature classes; because liberty does not only mean freedom of arranging one’s schedule, it is also freedom in creating and interpreting, while these features are almost absent in the case of MOOCs. Green (2013) expresses this opinion in a brief sentence: “Here is an uncomfortable truth: this freedom is less a reality of our industry than a sensation” (p. 2).

Starting from these observations and having as a base our teaching experience, we started wondering which of the methods can provide better results for our students: the traditional one or the MOOCs and the interactive approaches. We also question the benefits of all these approaches, mainly the students’ perception of these methods.

4. Purpose of the Study

During the last years, teaching French studies at university, in Romania, has become quite a difficult task, the reasons of which are various: the decrease of the interest for French language, in general and, as a consequence, for the French literature and culture, the general lack of interest for humanities in general and for literature in particular, this one tends to be considered useless and boring. So, our challenge, as a professor, has been to find alternative ways to teach French literature, especially the Enlightenment epoch, that is our domain, to the first year university students. Other issues have appeared: apart from the general ones, already evoked: the first, XVIIIth French century is a period that the students almost ignore, so the goal is also to get them interest in a literary and historical epoch that seems obsolete for them; then, the poor knowledge of French language for many students, making thus difficult the access and the comprehension of original texts.

Our goal is to have the students study and understand the Enlightenment French Literature by using alternative methods: on line movies based on books of that period, audio books used together with the printed text, on line courses and/or discussion, on line exercises, etc.

5. Research Methods

Our strategy consisted in combining traditional teaching of literature – oral presentations about the general literary and historic context, about the main concepts of the epoch, about the most important writers and about their works; Power Point presentations; group work – with alternative ways: films based on the literary texts, on-line exercises and presentations, audio books, MOOCs.

Certainly, as we are speaking about regular students, MOOCs were a solution that should be used with precaution, as those students are following the courses in presentia. Nevertheless, the advantages of using from time to time MOOCs are, first, the fact that the estimated work time is given at the beginning of the course, then, they reduce the students' effort to learn by implying hearing, reading and view, finally, the access to native speakers discourse.

We have exposed our students, alternatively, to traditional teaching, to MOOCs and to interactive in presentia courses, our goal being to observe their behaviour during the classes and to measure their learning results. The evaluation of the results has been both permanent, at the end of each class and final, during the exams. Questions about the necessity and the benefits of each method have been put at the end of each class; more than that, anonymous questionnaires have been applied to students, trying to find mainly their perception and interest for the methods applied. As for the scientific results, they have been observed in the results of the final examination

6. Findings

We have tried to find MOOCs delivered in French, as literature classes are taught in French in our university. On the contrary, there is a real limited resource of MOOCs in French, on the literary domain. Coursera and Udacity have no offer of MOOCs in French for French literature. Instead, Edx hosts some MOOCs conceived by French universities, for example those in Sorbonnex – free online courses from Sorbonne University System. Although there is no course on the Enlightenment French literature, those courses could be used, to some extent, for teaching other literary epochs, as they are delivered by very important professors, in French. FunMooc also provides some MOOCs on literature, in French but, again, not on the epoch that interests us; they also can be used in teaching other epochs, as they are well conceived, accompanied by activities that render them quite interactive and important francophone universities provide them. The MOOCs recorded at Yale University present the advantage of being accompanied by the text transcript; the big disadvantage is that they are delivered in English. We also want to mention the MOOCs provided by France Education Tv, which are in French, which is a great advantage, they are presented in written and audio-video presentation; nevertheless, the level is not adequate for the university students, as they are essentially popularisation courses. The table 1 below summarise our observations on MOOCs.

Table 01. Main French literature MOOCs. Features

SORBONNEX www.edx.org	OPEN YALE COURSES www.oyc.yale.edu	FRANCETVEDUCATION www.education.francetv.fr	FUNMOOC www.fun-mooc.fr
very few literature courses	few literature courses	brief literature courses; medium level	very few literature courses
lecturers recorded at Sorbonne, available in video	lecturers recorded at the Yale College, available in video and text transcript	available in video, with blackboard presentation (written)	lecturers delivered by French and Francophone universities,
delivered in French free and open access	delivered in English free and open access	delivered in French free and open access	various types of activities; delivered in French free and open access

Other types of alternative materials and instruments are quite largely available on-line: documentaries, films, on-line activities, audio books, e-books. A large range of resources in French can provide good complementary materials to the traditional teaching. One of the most trustful is CanalU, a platform that provides documentaries, films and other types of pedagogical resources, in French and having the label of French universities. Still, the literature is less represented than other domains. Archives Audiovisuelles de la Recherche is also a good source of video documents and pedagogical resources; for university proposes a good selection has to be made, as the public this platform addresses to is not especially the academic one. Finally, La Vie des Classiques and Littérature Audio.com are excellent resources of audio books and e-books, very useful for teaching. The table 2 and 3 below present briefly the characteristic of the platforms.

Table 02. French literature resources and features (a)

CANALU http://www.canal-u.tv	LA VIE DES CLASSIQUES http://www.laviedesclassiques.fr
documentaries in French	films and documentaries in French
university level	e-books
pedagogical resources	
scientific resources	

Table 03. French literature resources and features (b)

ARCHIVES AUDIOVISUELLES DE LA RECHERCHE http://www.archivesaudiovisuelles.fr	LITTÉRATURE AUDIO.COM http://www.litteratureaudio.com
on line documents	e-books in French
pedagogical resources	audio books in French
scientific resources	free access
video documents	

7. Conclusion

Our goal has been to have our students study and understand the French Enlightenment Literature by offering them two convergent ways of access: the traditional teaching and the interactive one (MOOCs, on line activities, films, audiobooks). We have experienced all those practices, with our students, during the last year and we have observed all teaching practices have their limits: traditional teaching tends to be boring, mostly when the subject is new or complicated for the students, in exchange, the interaction between the teacher and the students is very well represented; Power Point presentations have certain advantages, mostly by facilitating the understanding. Thus, they can lead to very interesting and involving group works. MOOCs have the disadvantage of the low interactivity between the teacher and the students, creating the sensation of isolation; on the other hand, access to the information is easier – audio, video, sometimes written – and there is also the advantage of attending courses delivered by native speakers. Films and audio books are very attractive for students. Films facilitate the access to the literature and they offer also the experience of native speakers, but they must not be perceived as substitutes for the active reading. Audio

books, in their turn, offer direct access to the literary text, facilitating the comprehension and reducing the effort of reading.

Our conclusion is that the increase of the students' interest for the French Enlightenment Literature and their success at exams can be achieved by the corroboration of different didactic practices, starting from the traditional ones, combined to modern resources.

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