CHALLENGES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING LINGUISTICS ONLINE

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Abstract:
This empirical research intends to shed light on the challenges of teaching and learning online courses in linguistics. The endeavor is based on the belief that research finds out the most appropriate pedagogy for successful online course in linguistics. Once the pedagogy of teaching the online course is designed, the educational technology provides suitable tools to facilitate interaction between online course participants. On this basis, this empirical is conducted to survey the teachers and students having participated in online course in linguistics to map out the impact of the strategies employed in the course and the technological tools exploited on their learning and experience in general. The data show that a hybrid method is the best option for a successful online linguistics course. Teachers and students need both gain learned knowledge in order to build a digital educational environment that allows for successful content exchange and communicative interaction.

Keywords: Linguistics, online course, challenges, hybrid, blended, covid19

Introduction
The interest in learning and teaching linguistics online has grown immensely as of late reflecting the rapid change in distance education and training in general. As a result, distance linguistics as a field of learning, study and research has witnessed ground-breaking progress. In fact, the impact of change touches upon various components of the online course in linguistics. Accordingly, teaching and learning Linguistics online was launched by pioneers in different parts of the globe as early as the onset of the 20th century. However, clear cut theory on methodology of teaching and learning linguistics online has not yet been defined and issued. Research in methodology of teaching and learning linguistics online mainly relate to empirical experiences and practices bound to specific environments and settings. The need for teaching and learning linguistics online has become more urgent and necessary with the advent and universal spread Corona virus which imposed complete shutdown. In this context, this paper reports on an endeavour to assess the experience and perspectives of both students and teachers towards teaching and learning linguistics online. On this basis, this paper is structured into three parts. The first section relates to a review of previous experiences worldwide in teaching and learning linguistics online. The second section exhibits the results from the empirical research conducted during period of Covid19 while the third section draws implications and conclusions from the present study.

Previous experiences
This section aims to study and highlights previous endeavours of teaching and learning linguistics online. These experiences were conducted within universities in Europe and The United States of America. The present review gears towards mapping out the methodology applied and educational technology exploited. The first source is “Teaching Online Courses in Linguistics” (Babcock et al, 2015) which is a descriptive and evaluative study. The onset of the paper displays the main reason behind the study:
After teaching such a course online without a great deal of success (students in Babcock’s course were frustrated and sometimes angry and their work was not up to par), the primary investigator wanted to find out what other instructors were doing, and what the proven ingredients were in a successful course.

It is customary in literature to read about successes in teaching experiments rather than failures. In contrast, Babcock’s report investigates the reasons behind the learners’ frustrations with online course in linguistics. The study was oriented to answer the following research questions (Babcock et al, 2015, p.10):

Q: Is it possible to teach a successful intro to linguistics course online?

Q: What are the ingredients in a successful experience? What are the characteristics of the student, the teacher, the course design itself?

Babcock reviewed literature studying factors contributing to successful online courses in linguistics. The first factor relates to the positiveness of the students towards the use of the internet and technology. This is termed as “self-efficacy” which is “Perceived self-efficacy refers to people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own activities” (dictionary.cambridge.org). The students learning linguistics online exhibit self-efficacy through spending considerable time on the web seeking ampler understanding of the issue studied. The second factor leading to the success of an online course in linguistics is willingness or readiness to interact regularly with peers and instructors on discussion boards. Instructor-learner easy going relationship helps in successful course.

Equally important is the course design and the delivery method of the course material. The methodology of structuring and monitoring the course has an impact on the learners’ sustainable engagement. The researchers contacted the students having enrolled accomplished study of the course. The total number of students were 35, but only 19 responded to the survey and interview. Babcock interviewed teachers in person and on the net, posting a question on the forum, http://linguistlist.org/index.cfm. Babcock’s course content and activities consisted mostly of textbook reading, discussion, and homework. The online course introduced the fundamental branches of linguistics two of which, namely phonology and morphology, the students found most difficult.

The values the students underlined as necessary for success in the survey are “dedication, prior knowledge, self-discipline, desire, effort, time, commitment and positive attitude” (p. 13) The most important quality needed in an online instructor to help succeed an online course in linguistics is availability to answer the students’ questions in synchronous and asynchronous forum discussions. This fact relates closely to the qualities needed in an online course design. Live chat about issues studied is most preferred by most students. However, some may hesitate to indulge in such discussions and keep taciturn while watching. The students opt for videos as course assignments and see it mandatory to have face-to-face meeting before the onset of online course. The students also request additional modes of instruction such PowerPoints and audio files.

Further analysis of the online course in linguistics, Babcock provides a description of the content of self-paced course and its structure. Via Blackboard platform, the teacher disseminated video lectures, reading assignments and tests. Motivation and ability to apply knowledge on the part of the learners are regarded essential for success of the course.

To sum up, successful online course in linguistics necessitates principled implementation of a considerable number of assumptions related the learner’ skills and cognitive assets, the
content of the course and the personality of the teacher. To assess whether an online course is successful, the procedure of assessment should encompass criteria evaluating the three-component stated, the learner, the content and the instructor.

Teaching linguistics online at FLAM

The present experience of teaching linguistics online dates back to September 2019. Following an online training on using educational technology in English language classroom in 2018, I decided to implement the learning in an empirical experience at the Faculty of Arabic Language, Marrakech (FLAM).

Figure 1. Certificate on training in using educational technology

I received further training on the use of technology in education during my participation in IVLP program. Immediately after, skills in devising online courses with the help of educational technology is expanded and consolidated in a hands-on training in person organized in Marrakech, November 2019.

Figure 2. IVLP participation Certificate
The course is already launched online by September 2019. Then, covid19 came and shutdown was complete. Teachers and students in all streams and studies had to move online. Two terms of were accomplished through either fully distant or hybrid learning and studying. The present study investigates the perceptions of the teachers and learners on learning and studying linguistics online.

**Challenges of learning linguistics online**

The study intends to map out the reactions of both the students and teachers towards learning linguistics online. The students and teachers are compelled to study the subject in distance because of Covid19. The study was launched by the end of June 2020 when the term came to an end. A survey was administered to students and teachers as members of WhatsApp groups created for the purpose of sharing academic files and news related to the courses taught at the Faculty of Arabic Language. 60 people responded to the survey. The overall aim is to develop the practice of teaching and learning linguistics online on the basis of principled implementation theoretical concepts and assumptions. Hence, the following sections displays the results from the survey administered through WhatsApp and Facebook group pages. A commentary on the outcomes follows as the discussion unfolds.

Reviewing the literature consolidates the need for principled research to achieve success in online courses in linguistics (OCL). Research informs, feeds and orient practical pedagogy which in its turn sharpens the proficiency of application and implementation in setting. The educational provides media of transmission of knowledge and environment for performance such assignment tools and synchronous meetings.

45 out of 60 respondents are students and 38 are undergraduate. The rest of the respondents are teachers. Whether the respondents are females or males doesn’t make difference in the results of the research. However, it is worth noting that 35 of the respondents are females while only 25 are males.
It is also noteworthy that 41 respondents over 62 are over 30 years old while 17 are between 19 and 25 years old. This means that the majority of the respondents are undergraduate aged more than 30. These can be working people, too.

The first question the respondent is asked is to rate their skill in using the educational technology.
53 over 60 respondents claim that they are good at using designing, processing and evaluation tools as educational technology. Only 7 of the respondents rate their skills as low. This shows that the survey is being processed by the right target people.

Figure 7 shows that 38 respondents have experienced online course in linguistics during Covid-19. 11 people claim they have never enrolled in online courses in linguistics. This fact confirms that the answers included in the survey are well-informed. The following figures bring further depth to the discussion and expression of the attitudes towards online courses in linguistics:
Basing on the fact that the majority of the respondent (33) are satisfied and only 8/60 are not so, they prefer to experience online courses in a blended strategy as it is exhibited in figure 9.
Figure 10. The degree of importance of electronic formats in online course in linguistics creating, editing and managing Word, Excel, PowerPoint and PDF documents are very important as a skill necessary to the success of online course in Linguistics. In comparison, social media is regarded as simply important by 32 in contrast with the use of the electronic formats mentioned above which are deemed to be as very important.

Figure 11. The degree of importance of social media in online course in linguistics

Following components are ingredients of any typical online course. The respondents in this survey see that these components are either important or very important to the success of an online course in linguistics. The four figures below relate to the different elements inherent in an online learning environment.
The first figure shows that the 33 respondents believe that creating virtual classroom for interaction is very important in addition to 17 believing it is important. As for lecturing in live session, 31 regard it very important and 23, important. Only 23 of the 60 respondents see setting interactive quizzes as very important and 25, important. More people are hesitant towards the extreme importance of interactive evaluation. 27 people claim that the use of linguistics software is highly important for the success of online course in linguistics in addition to 23 who rank exploiting linguistics software as important. Those who don’t know, see a component as of low importance or not important at all share the percentage between 3% and 15%; that is to say, they are a minority in the population targeted by this survey.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this empirical research is map out the challenges of teaching and learning online courses in linguistics. Reviewing the literature available in this issue brought about very few but important resources to orient the study. Valuable assumptions rose while reading the literature; to develop online course in linguistics research has the most influencing role. It is through research that the pedagogy of online course in linguistics can be developed. Once the pedagogy of teaching the online course is defined and structured, the educational technology comes into play to provide appropriate learning environment and facilitate interaction between online course participants. It is in this respect that is empirical is conducted. The participants, teachers and students, in online course in linguistics are surveyed to map out the impact of the strategies employed in the course and the technological tools exploited on their learning and experience in general. The findings confirm that blended strategy is the most appropriate for a successful online course in linguistics. Both teachers and students should acquire learned knowledge to create educational digital environment facilitating successful sharing of material and communicative interaction.

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