Chapter 10
Supporting Language Learning With OERs and Open–Authoring Tools

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ABSTRACT

Open educational resources (OERs) in language learning have recently captured the interests of language educators, curriculum developers, and researchers as these open-source materials serve as an alternative to traditional textbooks and costly web-based learning resources. OERs offer several benefits for language learners, including access to controlled language practice, self-study, engagement, and learning satisfaction. These resources can also promote innovative instructional practices that respond to constructivist and interactionist perspectives of second language acquisition. However, widespread use of open resources remains low among language teachers for several reasons, including a lack of awareness of how to develop and use them, overreliance on commercially produced textbooks, scarcity of resources, and guidelines for developing original open resources. In this chapter, the authors explore how to best approach the process of creating and using open resources in order to develop and promote OERs among language educators.
INTRODUCTION

The use of Open Educational Resources (OERs) in language learning has become more prominent in recent years as an alternative to traditional textbooks and costly web-based materials in blended and online learning. According to UNESCO, “Open Educational Resources are any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license. The nature of these open materials means that anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt, and re-share them. OERs range from textbooks to curricula, syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, tests, projects, audio, video, and animation” (2012).

Despite the increased interest in OERs for language learning, its integration into the language classroom is still limited and presents challenges. Some of the challenges in the development and use of OERs relate to its structure—scope and sequence of linguistic content, and the practice of language skills. When creating an OERs, language teachers also need to consider the resources available including material designers, technology tools, media content developers, and assessment practices (e.g., formative, summative, form-focused, context-based). In addition, language teachers may seek to build activities that provide students with ample opportunities to use the language in meaningful tasks and activities. At the same time, teachers may also want to give students opportunities to develop autonomy and agency in the access and use of language learning materials. Thus, all of these considerations, coupled with our background and expertise in designing language learning experiences, led us to explore how to best approach the process of creating and using open resources in order to develop and promote OERs among language educators.

One strategy to support the creation of original OER content is through the use of an open authoring tool that allows educators to create, share, and reuse content. This chapter presents such a strategy along with a sample lesson plan outline and discusses the practical insights and limitations of creating interactive OERs and OER content.

BACKGROUND

The rising popularity of OERs began around 2001 when the MIT OpenCourseWare initiative promoted the development and use of educational and research resources under an intellectual property license or public domain that allows others to reuse and repurpose these resources for free (Adams et al., 2013; Weller et al., 2015). Research and initiatives on the use of OERs have identified compelling reasons to promote their use including a considerable reduction in the cost of learning materials, affording equal access to content and knowledge to a wider audience, enhancing...
instruction and pedagogical strategies, and improving student engagement (McGill et al., 2013; Weller et al., 2015). In addition, OERs facilitate the adaptation of learning resources at varying levels (e.g., create own material, aggregate elements, contextualize materials) as well as lead to more reflective practice on the part of instructors (Weller et al., 2015) and encourage learner-driven learning (Conole, 2013). The use of OERs also enables educators to “learn from and contribute to their professional practice” (Littlejohn & Hood, 2017, p. 1-2) allowing them to expand their range of knowledge and expertise in educational innovations. The use of OERs is also well perceived by students who largely regard the quality as similar to traditional publisher textbooks (Bliss et al., 2013).

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

There is a growing interest in language teaching and learning for creating, using, and evaluating OERs. However, little is known about how these resources can best be combined with other learning materials and instructional practices (Blyth, 2012). In language learning, there remains a lack of awareness of the value and use of OERs. While the use of online dictionaries and spell checkers is high, general interest in the use of open resources broadly remains low among language teachers despite the many benefits OERs offer language learners, instructors, and institutions (Pérez-Paredes et al., 2018). The use of OERs has been shown to positively impact student satisfaction and performance significantly (Weller et al., 2015). The low cost and open access of these materials for students taking required foreign language courses increases motivation. Because open resources can be made available for self-study after courses end, students’ interest in language learning is more likely to extend beyond the scope of the course (Goodwin-Jones, 2017). OERs can foster students’ opportunities to develop autonomy through self-check quizzes and other student-focused activities to monitor their own progress, notice language gaps, draw attention to linguistic features and accuracy, engage with language use, access authentic models of the target language, and increase interest in language activities outside the classroom. The increased autonomy also provides opportunities to access controlled practice of difficult language features which can improve students’ ability to self-monitor their learning while also providing instructors with formative assessment and—if integrated into a learning management system (LMS)—analytics they can use to guide instruction, provide feedback, and modify assessments. The integration of interactive and meaningful OERs in the language classroom can also promote innovation in instructional practices that respond to constructivist and interactionist perspectives that support second language acquisition (Dixon & Hondo, 2013).
According to Blyth, in our highly technological world, many more students enrolled in language classes are blending their formal education by combining OERs with the publisher’s materials. Thus, language educators need to familiarize themselves with the resources and technologies available that will enable them to embrace the use of OERs in their language classrooms. OERs offer pedagogical advantages and control over course materials for instructors. Freedom to choose content fosters innovation and reduces the need to rely on textbooks which often present a narrow view of the countries in which a particular language is spoken. As popular culture typically informs the context of language courses, many texts become outdated quickly. Unlike publisher texts, OERs can be continuously updated, giving instructors the ability to tailor content to be culturally relevant and responsive to their students’ needs and interests. Instructors may choose to adapt authentic materials to suit the level of language proficiency, create original content around selected themes, or even include student-generated content representative of the complex identities of a group of language learners. Instructors who create rich and instructionally sound OER content available for use broadly and freely can not only increase their reputation and credibility as academics, but they can also raise the profile of the institution as a source of high-quality content for language teaching and learning (Weller et al., 2015).

Despite the several benefits that OERs offer, Blyth (2012) identifies three concerns that instructors have for integrating these resources: quality control, copyright, and sustainability. Many instructors can limit the use of certain resources on the internet labeling them as unreliable and inaccurate such as Wikipedia, and for language learning Google translate. Creating and using OERs should not be conceived as an ill-structured process; to the contrary, Plotkin (2010) presents two methods to ensure the quality of OERs: (1) vetted and top-down with the support of institutional resources, and (2) open collaborators and authors. While these concerns are valid and need to be addressed upfront in the process of creating open resources, embracing OERs can lead to creative ways to teach and learn languages.

H5P AS AN OER: SAMPLE LESSON FORMAT

There is an extensive array of digital tools available that can be used to create rich, engaging, and interactive content for meaningful language learning in an open format. One of these tools is H5P (h5p.org), an open-source authoring tool for creating a variety of custom content types including multiple choice, hotspots, dictation, branching scenarios, timelines, interactive presentations, to name a few. This authoring tool facilitates the creation of digital content more efficiently without having to rely on sophisticated software programs or coding applications. H5P is
versatile, generally accessible, and easy to use. The H5P tool affords teachers and students options to create, share, and reuse content through websites, browsers, and integration into an LMS. Several practical insights of this digital tool include:

- Creating interactive activities more effectively and efficiently by using a web browser and plug-in.
- Accessing the activities in multiple devices as it offers mobile-friendly options.
- Sharing and adapting content easily in a browser, allowing easy import and export of a variety of activity types.
- Integrating the activities into websites and an LMS by embedding the activities or using Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) plug-ins.
- Immediate feedback and options to retry each activity multiple times.

Instructors might integrate focused practice activities throughout a lesson sequence for reinforcement and informal assessment or create tasks for language practice taking a “chunking” approach by presenting language in context. Another option would be to create a series of modules designed to isolate particularly difficult language points that students may struggle with to provide additional practice and reinforcement. Because this application can be decontextualized from any specific curriculum, it has the potential to be shared widely across institutions and among independent language learners.

In this section, we offer a model language unit followed by examples of H5P activities that might be used to support the language presented here (Table 1). For the purpose of this introduction to H5P, we have integrated only a few of the more than 50 H5P content types available. Figures 1-7 present the types of activities for our sample unit.

Table 1. Sample unit for a basic Spanish course (CEFR A1)

| Language Objectives:          | Learning Scenario Context | Language Functions | Grammar & Structures | Vocabulary | Language Skills          |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| Introduce yourself and others | In the classroom          | - Talking about self| - Alphabet & pronunciation | - Numbers 1-20 | Reading: Student profile  |
| Describe the classroom        |                           | - Spelling words out| - Ser & llamarme     | - Classroom | Listening: “Nice to meet you!” |
| Exchange personal information |                           | - Asking for personal information | - Subject pronouns (nouns/articles) | - Geography | Speaking: Interview a classmate |
| Use register appropriately in addressing people |                           |                    |                      |            | Writing: Classmate profile |
| Become familiar with aspects of cultural context |                           |                    |                      |            | Pronunciation: (v vs. b)  |
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Type of H5P Activity: Mark the Words (Figure 1).
Type of H5P Activity: Dictation (Figure 2).
Type of H5P Activity: Drag and Drop (Figure 3).

**Figure 1. Sample of a cloze activity to practice the use of subject pronouns**

Complete the student profile by selecting the appropriate pronoun in parenthesis.

Carlos y yo estudiamos mecatrónica en la universidad. (Nosotros / él / yo) es de Baranquilla y (él / yo) soy de Salamanca. (Él / Ella) tiene una hermana gemela que vive en Little Rock y estudia finanzas. Se llama Gaby y a (ella / él) le gusta mucho los números y las cuentas.

(Nosotros / Ella / Ellos) son muy jóvenes para vivir solos pero tienen muchos amigos. En cambio (él / yo) no tengo hermanos ni hermanas.

(Ella / Nosotros / yo) somos buenos amigos.

**Figure 2. Sample listening comprehension for vocabulary related to numbers**

Listen to the recordings. Type the numbers that you hear.

Carlos' phone number

4415329737

Gaby's phone number

5017325592

You have made 1 mistake(s).
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Figure 3. Sample of matching numbers and form to reinforce written vocabulary

![Matching activity: numbers]

Figure 4. Sample quiz for reinforcing vocabulary related to the classroom setting

![Sample quiz]

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Type of H5P Activity: Flashcards (Figure 4).
Type of H5P Activity: Fill-in-the-Blank (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Sample activity for practice with nationalities used to exchange personal information

Write the nationality next to each country name using the form indicated (pay attention to the gender indicated in parenthesis).

Nicaragua: Nicaragüense ✓
México (m.): Mexicana ✗
Perú (f.): Peruana ✓
España (m.): Español ✓
Uruguay (f.): Uruguayo ✗
Ecuador (f.): Ecuatoriana ✓

4/6 ❌ Show solution ✓ Retry

Figure 6. Sample activity for reinforcement of geography and regional expressions used for introductions and to exchange personal information

Geography practice: Match the country to the common greeting phrase people use among friends

“¿Qué onda?”

Time spent: 0:10
Card turns: 8
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Figure 7. Sample activity for practice of classroom items used to describe the classroom environment

Type of H5P Activity: Memory Game (Figure 6).
Type of H5P Activity: Image Drag and Drop (Figure 7).

LIMITATIONS

Overall, OERs can have a great impact on pedagogical innovations and expand teaching and learning resources beyond a textbook. However, the use of OERs presents some challenges that may limit the efforts to integrate them into some educational contexts and should be considered before undertaking authoring projects. Challenges include reluctance to reuse material created by others and share resources more broadly (Rolfe, 2012; Weller, 2011); lack of guidelines on the use and evaluation of OERs for quality and accuracy of content (Adams et al., 2013; Baker, 2012); technical difficulties in access, development, and delivery of content; need for a sustainable team for development and authoring; and compliance with accessibility standards (Baker, 2012). Other challenges that were identified relate to the limited pedagogical guidelines that exist to assist in the development of our own OERs. For example, OER developers may have a steep learning curve while creating authentic materials, repurposing existing content to fit the curricular needs
of their students, or collaborating with subject matter experts. When implementing an OER to replace a large amount of content, such as a published textbook, extensive coordination is required. Programs need to determine the appropriate scope and sequence for the course and consider its place in the larger curriculum, author rich and creative original content around a theme, and produce media objects or search for existing media and images in the public domain.

While creating rich and interactive OERs through the H5P tool appears to be simple, this technology may require some costs associated with its integration in a learning management system and hosting services, limiting access for many teachers and students. Creating open interactive language activities in H5P requires a clear understanding that these activities will support the scope and sequence of language content in a cohesive unit of study (unless the activities are purposefully created as isolated and decontextualized language drill exercises). Another limitation that we encountered is the extent to which some of the H5P activity types can offer all content in accessible formats. While most of the activity types are accessible per the website description and comply with the WCAG 2.1 AA standards, a few of the content types do not have the H5P core team support, have browser limitations, and are unavailable for integration in the LMS.

CONCLUSION

OERs offer a unique opportunity for language teachers and programs to increase access to engaging, relevant, and customized content while lowering course materials costs for students. For instructors or institutions considering the development or use of OERs, we present recommendations and resources for further exploration.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO START WITH OERS

The following considerations can guide instructors or language programs interested in implementing OERs at the course or program level.

- Identify the unique needs of your specific educational context. What are the strengths of your current materials and resources? What content is overlooked or in need of reinforcement?
- Research OER content for language learning already available online that may suit your needs. Don’t reinvent the wheel! You may find existing modules or activities that can complement any new material you create or authentic videos or texts to base new activities on.
If your goal is to replace a published textbook or create large amounts of content, determine the scope and sequence of materials to be created using an OER tool:
- Identify content creators and assign roles for each chunk of content (specific levels or sequence of modules).
- Create a system for accuracy and editorial reviews to ensure integrity of OER content.
- Create a template or find models online for continuity across levels or modules and when collaborating with multiple content creators.

Follow WCAG 2.1 AA guidelines for accessibility (alt text for images, color schemes, headings and font, etc.)

Use Creative Commons images and be sure to cite materials when incorporating existing content.

Remember that when you decide to create an OER, make it more general than context-specific, so it can be reused and adapted across learning contexts more easily.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION:

Language instructors and other educators interested in learning more about OERs can explore the following resources to get started:

- COERLL Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning
- Open Education Consortium
- Merlot Language Resources
- OERCommons.org

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