

## The VLC-MOOC Linguistics 201 – The Structure of English



The VLC-MOOC<sup>1</sup> 201 was offered from 17 February to 14 April, i.e. over a period of 10 weeks. It served 530 participants from 68 nations.

It has been the most successful VLC-MOOC until now even though the topic was “Grammar”, a linguistic topic which is not considered to be the most exciting topics in linguistics.

In terms of accomplishment and success rates MOOC 201 has achieved results previously unknown. The reasons for this tremendous success can be found in a long experience of online teaching and learning, an operational platform that facilitates all necessary processes, from content delivery to electronic assessment and grading, and a didactic concept without parallels.

### The VLC Concept

The VLC Online Course Concept is unique: It combines instructional and explanatory videos with multimedia, e-assessment and a variety of additional practical options with model solutions.

### Mastery Learning and Video Support

All VLC-classes involve freely accessible instructional videos. The VLC-team has been producing such videos since mid-2012 and has meanwhile created the world’s leading linguistics video channel on YouTube with more than 260 videos, more than 2.500 views per day, and currently ca. 9.000 subscribers. The international reaction has been overwhelmingly positive and has led to quality-assured video material that is used all over the world.



### The Virtual Sessions

In addition to all other MOOCs on the web, and as a special quality feature, the VLC offers multimedia material (Virtual Sessions) plus a multitude of additional exercises and an operational and well-tested e-assessment infrastructure. The Virtual Sessions supply all participants with highly interactive multimedia content plus an E-Lecture that can also be independently accessed on YouTube. Thus, studying online on the VLC means: working through the content of the Virtual Sessions of a class.

### Assessment on the VLC

All assessments in a VLC MOOC are carried out on the basis of electronic tests – the so-called “Mastery Worksheets”, one per E-Learning unit. Mastery Worksheets have to be passed, that is participants have to score at least 60%. If they do not reach 60% or more in a first attempt they can try as often as they like – and no one will notice. Only if they pass, their score will be stored in the VLC-data base – and if they are not pleased with their score, they can do the test again, and overwrite their score until they are satisfied.

### Additional components

Each E-Learning unit is connected with a practical sheet where additional questions have to be solved. These questions that have become adaptive in character, i.e. they are delivered to each participant on the basis of their Mastery Level, are paired with model solutions that can be retrieved according to a pre-defined rhythm. The model solutions can be textual explanations, diagrams or short explanatory videos.

Further questions can be discussed in the class-related forum.

### Certification

Three certificates can be obtained:

- a statement of participation for regular attendance,
- a standard statement of accomplishment,
- a graded statement of accomplishment

<sup>1</sup> VLC = Virtual Linguistics Campus, [www.linguistics-online.com](http://www.linguistics-online.com)

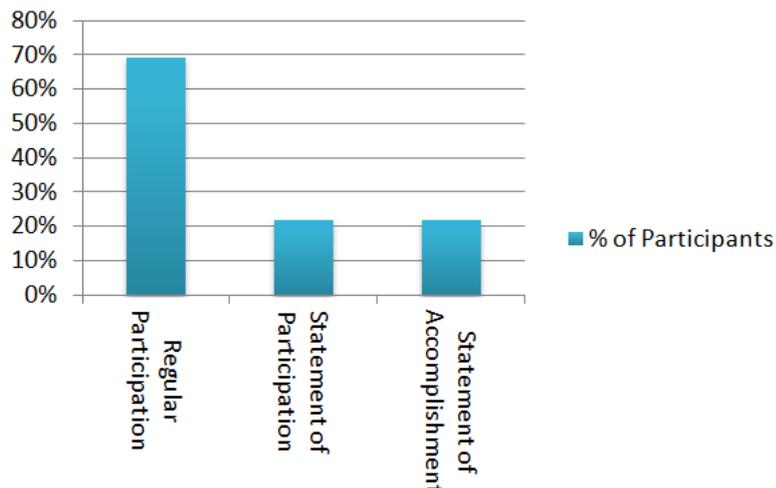
The latter two require a worksheet average of 60% or more, the graded statement of accomplishment – issued by Marburg University – includes the grade, a statement of the workload, all relevant class details and involves a small tuition fee.

### Details of the MOOC 201 – The Structure of English

The VLC-MOOC 201 had 530 participants from 68 nations. The overwhelming majority of the participants already had an academic degree ranging from BA to full professorship, furthermore there were more female than male participants in the MOOC:



Despite the “multimedia-resistant” topic “Grammar”, the accomplishment rates in the MOOC were astonishingly high:



Almost 70% of all participants were regularly online, 22% gained statement of participation, i.e. they worked with the material but did not reach a mastery level above 59%.

A statement of accomplishment was awarded to 22% of all participants. That is, 22% of all participants reached a course mastery level of 60% or more. A high percentage of these participants are currently converting their “Statement of Accomplishment” into a “**Graded** Statement of Accomplishment” for a small fee of 45,- €. The “Graded Statement of Accomplishment”, which includes the label “Marburg University” not only states that all course requirements have been met, it also exhibits a description of the course content, all test results, a final grade and a precise definition of the workload (exact figure to be published).

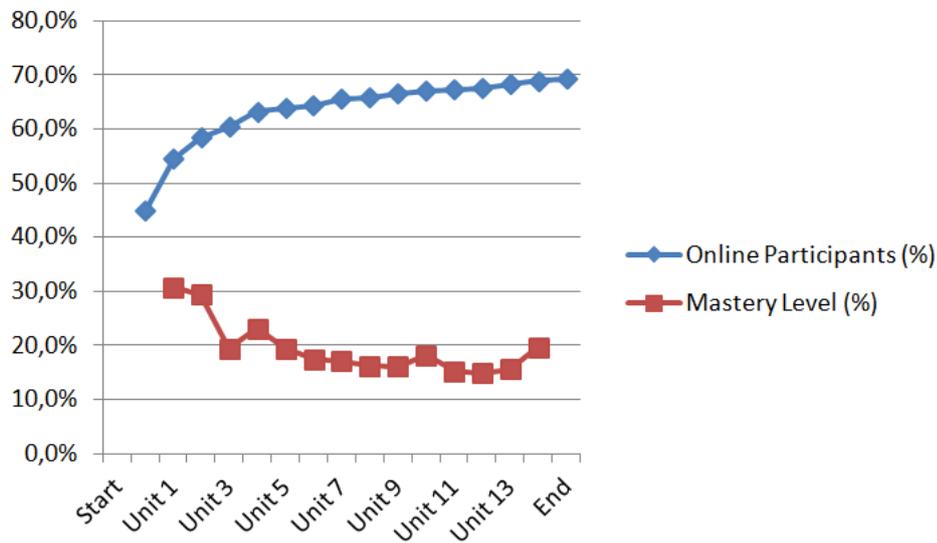
### Mastery Learning

As mentioned above, each E-Learning unit has a “Mastery Worksheet”, i.e. a worksheet with which students in all VLC classes demonstrate mastery. In on-campus classes, which are all organized in accordance with the Inverted Classroom Model, the mastery level normally averages 67%. In other words 67% of the students of an on-campus class come well-prepared to an in-class meeting.

In a MOOC, there is no necessity for showing mastery in time. Nevertheless, many more than 25% of all MOOC participants applied a steady temporal rhythm to demonstrate mastery. Thus, 25% of all MOOC participants would have been well-prepared had there been an in-class meeting. We conclude that the structure of VLC-MOOCs with their temporal organization and the principle of permanent testing is an important factor for the high success rate and – in the long run – sustainable learning effects.

## Some statistics

Online Participation started at around 45% and increased to a level of 70% towards class end. The mastery level, in a MOOC, i.e. the level of preparation when moving on to the next unit started on a high level of around 30%, later it hovered around 20%:



Here is an overview of further activities in the MOOC:

Activity	#No
Unit Accesses (total)	4570
Mastery Worksheets (total)	1911
Forum Views	2475
Forum Contributions (Topics)	101

In summary, despite its difficult topic, the VLC-MOOC 201 was a huge success. The participants were highly active; for a MOOC, the success rate was high – and the contributions by the class instructor were minimal:

- 5 round mails
- 4 forum contributions

Hence MOOC 201 was what it should be: An xMOOC with many user activities and reasonable success rates, and little class instructor intervention.

## The VLC MOOC Curriculum

The following MOOCs are part of the VLC MOOC curriculum:

- Linguistics 101 – *Linguistic Fundamentals*
- Linguistics 102 – *Speech Science*
- Linguistics 103 – *The Nature of Meaning*
- Linguistics 201 – *The Structure of English*
- Linguistics 202 – *Morphology and Syntax* (Test Phase)
- Linguistics 401 – *Linguistic Fieldwork* (Test Phase)

MOOCs 101 to 103 will be offered again as of August 2014, MOOCs 201 and 202 as of October 2014.

**Anonymous Comments (as part of the class evaluation):**

1. I really enjoyed this course and I hope to participate in more MOOC classes of this quality and intensity. I'm not a novice to linguistics though, so I wonder if some who've never studied linguistics would be able to appreciate the level at which it seems to start. It's very comprehensive but some of the worksheets may quiz you on material extraneous to that lesson. For example, the questions related to gapping (a term I had not previously known) turned up in the quizzes without being introduced in the video. But, don't take this as a negative criticism. The course is really good and appropriately hard.
2. I would like to thank you for this great course and the chance for improving my skills. Please please please never stop getting ideas for new courses. I also appreciate the certificates for "little" money. I am sure, many people cannot afford high fees. Keep up the good work and always stay healthy and happy. Best wishes, <name>
3. Sehr geehrte Professor Handke: Es war wunderbar. Ich vermisse die Grammatik der deutschen Sprache... Oder etwas über die Sprachen der Welt. Gratuliere! <http://translationsandlinguistic.blogspot.com.es/>
4. Some worksheets contain quest belonging to other classes on the VLC and had not been addressed by the content of the virtual lesson.
5. I was happy to see that the issues regarding duplicate material and inconsistencies in the virtual sessions were brought up and noted so that they will not occur again in the next class. I think considering that the class is worth three credits it should only be possible to access worksheets once or twice and the virtual sessions should not be accessible while the worksheet is in progress. Otherwise earning those three credits is a little too easy.
6. The content (both in the virtual sessions and the videos) is great and very informative. The virtual sessions and the videos often complemented each other, thus making it easier to process and understand the content.
7. Good things about the course: The video-lectures are enjoyable and the Professor is great  
Things that could be improved: Sometimes I found the questions in the worksheets not quite related to the material presented in the corresponding unit. I know it's difficult, but it would be great to have just one text book as a reference for the whole course.
8. I was disappointed that some course materials were duplicated/missing in Unit 12. I posted about this on the forum but unfortunately there was no feedback from any of the course team. It meant that the worksheet questions were almost impossible to answer.
9. More linguistics MOOCs please!
10. Thanks for the opportunity to take part in this on a gratuitous basis. It was great despite the teething troubles as typing errors etc.
11. The course represents a great contribution to the professional development of all students, teachers, and even linguists related to the field of English studies. I think that all participants could learn, refresh, expand and update their knowledge about the structure of English with the best methods and information that exist to this day.
12. The course was very interesting and I would like to be informed about any other similar ones. Also I would like to know if there is any possibility for a studies help for doing an MA in the University.
13. In general a great course! Thanks a lot!
14. I am very grateful to you Dr. Handke, as well as your team for the great work you have displayed with these MOOCs. In my particular case I have learned a lot from your teaching. I would also want to express that I am looking forward to register for the other MOOCs to come. Once again I thank you.
15. Some of the questions in the worksheets were not clear (the phrasing was not precise enough) or written in incorrect English (i.e. subject-verb inversion without the necessary question auxiliary). For the rest, very well done, congratulations! I definitely would recommend the site to others.
16. Another excellent course! Thanks so much!
17. Overall I really liked the course and would probably do another one. A few times it did appear that the course was put together with material that didn't fit together well. It seems that sometimes the worksheets may have had questions on material that wasn't covered in the lecture, that is, unless I just missed it somehow. In those cases I just did the worksheets multiple times and memorized the correct answer, but I don't really believe I understood the concepts in those cases. In the areas where the material fit together well, I believe I got a good education on the topics.
18. I would do a course again and would recommend it to others.
19. Keep up the good work. It is a great way of improving skills. Thanks a lot.
20. There were too many technical terms and distinctions that did not enhance my ability to teach the language better. I don't understand the reason for learning so many terms for different types of adverbials or pronouns. It

didn't deepen my understanding or appreciation for my native tongue. I began by watching all the videos, but realized that I needed just to take very specific notes about the rather cerebral definitions of terms in order to answer correctly on the worksheets. I wish this course had had more practical relevance.

21. A very well-structured, enjoyable course. VLC Marburg's courses stand head and shoulders above other centres' MOOCs that I have studied. The videos are excellent - I very much enjoy Jürgen's style of presentation.
22. VLC is a great place for MOOC as well as online learning.
23. I would like another course more specific, like in Syntax or specially Morphology and Phonology. As well I would like a course in Introduction in linguistics in general (not just in English). But I have enjoyed and learned a lot.
24. Questions in worksheets should not be repeated: sometimes it is possible to answer correctly just because one remembers the correct answer (thanks to a previous attempt).
25. Excellent MOOC. Thank you.
26. It would be nice to use authentic corpus in specific contexts in order to show examples- videos of people talking, for example. Is there a way of making linguistics less dense and so full of concepts.
27. Thanks
28. Thank you for sharing your work with us.