

**To be Deaf and practice (interactively and at a distance)  
foreign languages in a (m)OOC: first report about the  
E-SCALE project**

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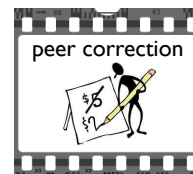
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## **To be Deaf and practice (interactively and at a distance) foreign languages in a (m)OOC: first report about the E-SCALE project - summary of the presentation slides**

*This symbol on the slides links to a chapter of the short accompanying video material.*



The presented project is created under the direction of Thierry Chanier, with the support of Laboratoire de Recherche sur le Langage, Université Blaise Pascal and Maison des Sciences de l'Homme of Clermont-Ferrand, France.

The idea is to provide an online environment where Deaf learners from France and the US come together to practice foreign languages.

Deaf learners should be seen as a linguistic and cultural minority with special education needs – teaching must therefore address their visual way of thinking. Since most Deaf children are born into hearing, non-signing families, ensuring extensive sign languages' acquisition is incumbent on the education system to make sure that they can become bimodal bilinguals. However, recovering from a century of oppression and attrition, sign languages are only very recently back in schools, legitimated in research, acknowledged as linguistic human rights and they are just starting to have appropriate tools provided. Our focus here lays more specifically on the foreign language learning tools.

Given the scattering of our target learners and the three-dimensional nature of signed languages, we opted for a connectivist sign language (massive) Open Online Course (c-SL-(m)OOC), where we provide interactive online learning activities, free and open to all, keeping a Deaf balance without the ambition to become massive. The connectivist dimension means that there are no recorded videolectures but hands-on activities requiring interaction (which can be seen as a practical and authentic complement to in-class lectures).

The objective of the E-SCALE project (*deaf E-space for Signed Collaboration Abroad on Language E-learning*) is to encourage intercultural communication and foreign language practice by means of collaborative exchange and learning together with Deaf peers from mainly France and the US (especially from Gallaudet, as the unique « Deaf university»). There are two kinds of involvement levels: as tutors (with a special pre-training provided) and as learners. There is no other requirement to participate than mastering at least one written and one signed language, in order to be able to exchange one's knowledge with the participants from the other country. Through webcam and keyboard the learners express themselves in the four working languages of the platform (American Sign Language, French Sign Language, written English, written French), either synchronously (during the Adobe Connect webcam meet-ups) or asynchronously (in Moodle forums, collaborative Prezis, Memrise lessons, etc.). Technically and pedagogically, handling the multimodality and the co-presence of four languages (including two non-written languages) is a challenge. Yet it is instructive to observe which choices a learner performs on which purpose, and when code-switching, code-mixing and code-blending or intercomprehension strategies and recourse to international signs happens. For the participants who wish to get involved in the enrichment of the learning resources, visual or signed tutorials explain how to create animated gifs or post videomessages with translated subtitles for example.

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The (m)OOC is scheduled over 2 x 4 weeks, preceded by optional 4 weeks of tutor training, between February and June (for more detailed numeric data and statistics, see slides). Several activities and language games have to be competed at each level and about once a week an optional synchronous session is scheduled where the learners can meet in a virtual video + text-chat room; at the beginning, most sessions are moderated by the tutors.

Learners get rewards in form of badges that can be displayed in social networks and for those who attend the whole (m)OOC, a certificate of participation is delivered.

The research component of the project investigates to what extent a Deaf conversation partner, who might master the foreign language only on an average, can induce a more productive participation and learning setting than a hearing teacher/expert/native speaker would do. Additionally, the mechanisms of Deaf intercultural communication and intercomprehension are analysed to get new insights about order and time to introduce writing and signing, as well as the suitable proportions of each modality in language learning settings.

The data collected during the (m)OOC is gathered into a LETEC-corpus (Learning and Teaching Corpora) that is made accessible online to be available for further researches. A teachers', tutors' and learners' community is also taking shape around the project idea, to share experiences, feedback and resources in a visual thinking/Deaf approach of interactive CALL and future SL-MOOCs.