Language Learning and Audio-Visual Aids (A Review Study)

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Abstract

We are living today in a rich audiovisual environment. As teachers, we must face the fact that this radically changes our students' attitude towards language and language learning. As Carter and Nunan (2002) pointed out, media have undoubtedly always facilitated the task of language learning for both instructed and non-instructed learners [1]. Just as children learning a first or second language grasp the meaning of words from the objects that surround them, non-native speakers (both inside and outside the classroom) make use of the here and now or objects in the immediate environment to process incoming speech. Whatever the approach as Celce-Murcia (2002) said, language teachers seem to agree that media can and do enhance language teaching, and thus in the daily practice of language teaching we find the entire range of media-from nonmechanical aids such as household objects, flashcards, and magazine pictures all the way up to sophisticated mechanical aids such as video cameras and computer-assisting teachers in their jobs, bringing the outside world into the classroom, and in short, making the task of language learning a more meaningful and exciting one [2].

Introduction

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As Carter and Nunan (2002) pointed out, media have undoubtedly always facilitated the task of language learning for both instructed and non-instructed learners [2]. Just as children learning a first or second language grasp the meaning of words from the objects that surround them, non-native speakers (both inside and outside the classroom) make use of the here and now or objects in the immediate environment to process incoming speech

In the St. Cloud (or audiovisual) method, which was developed primarily for the teaching of French as a foreign language [3], all language items were introduced to learners via contextualized, audiovisual presentations (usually filmstrips or slide shows with an accompanying soundtrack). The underlying approach assumed that language is an acoustic-visual whole that cannot be separated from its constituent elements. Similarly, in the Silent Way, the sound-color charts and rods form a central visual component of the method, allowing the teacher to present and elicit language while at the same time providing the students with tools for the creative construction of language (Carter, 1999).

Audiovisual approach marked the start of the technological age in language teaching and it did introduce important new element and emphasized the need for visual presentation and possibility of eliciting language from visual cues. It placed more

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weight on the use of foreign language in classroom by both teacher and pupil, and the language used was of greater practicality. More gifted teachers used new courses with great success -- moved forward to open -- ended question and answer work and extended dialog, designed their own supplementary materials, exercises and worksheets (Rodriguez, 2000).

In short, media help us to motivate students by bringing a slice of real life into the classroom and by presenting language in its more complete communicative context. Media can also provide a density of information and richness of cultural input not otherwise possible in the classroom, they can help students process information and free the teacher from excessive explanation, and they can provide contextualization and a solid point of departure for classroom activities [4].

Why use video?

These days, there is an increasing amount of video material available. For example, most course books now have their own video cassettes, and supplementary video material is produced by many ELT publishers. In addition, there is an enormous number of films and documentaries on sale to the general public. These usually cost much less than ELT materials since they are sold to a much larger market. Then there are television programmes and commercials.

The effective use of video requires knowledge and planning. You should select material with clear objectives and the learners' level and interests in mind, and get to know it well before using it. There should be a clear purpose for every video clip you show, for example, modeling communicative interactions in English, working at language forms, developing listening comprehension, or generating discussion [2].

Any videos accompanying your course books should be at an appropriate level of difficulty for the learners, and relevant to the course syllabus. Even so, you need to decide what you will use and you will omit, just as with any other course book material. You need to find extracts that suit your teaching objectives, and then design activities for them. You should not use material simply because it is available, but because it really serves your purposes. To some people video tape is merely a glorified version of audio tape, and the use of video in class is just listening "with pictures" [5].

As Harmer (2001) said, there are many reasons why video can add a special, extra dimension to the learning experience [6]:

Seeing language-in-use: one of the main advantages of video is that students do not just hear language, they see it too. This greatly aids comprehension, since for example, general meaning and moods are often conveyed through expression, gesture and other visual clues. Thus we can observe how intonation can match facial expression. All such paralinguistic feature give valuable -meaning clues and help viewers to see beyond what they are listening to, and thus interpret the text more deeply. Cross-cultural awareness: video uniquely allows students a look at situations far beyond their classroom. This is especially useful if they want to see, for example, typical British 'body language' when inviting someone out, or how Americans speak to waiters. Video is also of great value in giving students a chance to see such things as what kinds of food people eat in other countries, and what they wear. The power of creation: when students use video cameras themselves they are given the potential to create something memorable and enjoyable. The camera operators and directors suddenly have considerable power. The task of video- making can provoke genuinely creative and communicative uses of the language, with students finding themselves doing new things in English. Motivation: for all of the reasons so far mentioned, most students show an increased level of interest when they have a chance to see language in use as well as hear, and when this is coupled with interesting tasks.

Why do we use materials / what are materials for?

Language instruction has five important components--students, a teacher, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation. Why are materials important in language instruction? What do materials do in language instruction? Can we teach English without a textbook? Allwright (1990) argued that materials should teach students to learn, that they should be resource books for ideas and activities for instruction/learning, and that they should give teachers rationales for what they do. O'Neill (1990), in contrast, stated that materials may be suitable for students' needs, even if they are not designed specifically for them, that textbooks make it possible for students to review and prepare their lessons, which textbooks are efficient in terms of time and money, and that textbooks can and should allow for adaptation and improvisation [1].

Doff (1990) emphasized that materials help learning and teaching. It is true that in many cases teachers and students rely heavily on textbooks, and textbooks determine the components and methods of learning, that is, they control the content, methods, and procedures of learning. Students learn what is presented in the textbook, and the way the textbook presents material is the way students learn it. The educational philosophy of the textbook will influence the class and the learning process. Therefore, in many cases,

materials are the center of instruction and one of the most important influences on what goes on in the classroom [7].

Teachers perception of the effects of learning aids in teaching

Adeyanju (2006) claimed that learning and teaching is the concern of the trained teacher. But learning is a complex process. It can however be defined as a change in disposition; a relatively permanent change in behavior overtime and this is brought about by experience. Learning can occur as a result of newly acquired skill, knowledge, perception, facts, principles, new information at hand etc. Learning can be reinforced with learning aids of different variety because they stimulate, motivate as well as arrest learner's attention for a while during the instructional process   Learning aids are instructional materials and devices through which teaching and learning are done in schools. Examples of learning aids include visual aids, audiovisual aids, real objects and many others. The visual aids are designed materials that may be locally made or commercially produced. They come in form of wall-charts illustrated pictures, pictorial materials and other two dimensional objects. There are also audio-visual aids. These are teaching machines like radio, television, and all sorts of projectors with sound attributes [8].

It is interesting to note that a large percentage of trained teachers and those undergoing professional training courses can teach with some of the learning aids. They do so consciously because they know that the use of learning aids has positive effect on learning outcomes. In an on-going action research by investigators in Winneba District, a survey sample of teachers with several years of teaching experience of between (03) and twenty-five (25) years, claimed that learning aids improve methodology. They also claimed that learning aids reduce their talk and chalk method (Altman, 2003).

The power of video recordings in a language classroom

Although teaching with video can be exciting, but as Loneran (1992) put it, it is not a new methodology. Maybe one of the main effects of video is that by generating interest and motivation, the video films can create a climate for successful learning. Video materials used in language teaching can come from wide variety of sources. Hollinger (2007) broadly categorized them as follows [9]:

- Video recordings of language teaching broadcasts and films.
- Video recordings of domestic television broadcasts, such as comedy programs and news programs.
- Video recordings of specialist films and television programs, such as documentaries produced by industry or education programs.
- Video language teaching materials made for the classroom rather than for public transmission as broadcasts.

Video types

There are three basic types of video which can readily be used in class: off- air programs, real-world videos, and language learning videos [6].

Off-air programs: programs recorded from a television channel should be engaging for our students, and of a sensible length. We have to consider their comprehensibility too. Apart from overall language level, some off-air video is also extremely difficult for the students to understand, especially where particularly marked accents are used or where there is a high preponderance of slang or regional vernacular. The best programs and excerpts are ones which we can use for a range of activities including prediction, cross-cultural awareness, teaching language, or as spurs for the students' own creativity.

Real-world video: there is no reason to why we and our students should not use separately published videotape material such as feature films, exercise manuals, wildlife documentaries or comedy provided that there are no copyright restrictions for doing this. Once again we need to make our choice based on how engaging and comprehensible the extract is likely to be, and whether has multi-use potential. We need to judge the length of the extract in the same way too.

Language learning videos: many publishers now produce free-standing language learning videos-or videos to accompany course books. Frequently these have accompanying workbooks.

The main advantage of specially made video is that they have been designed with students at a particular level in mind. They are thus likely to be comprehensible, designed to appeal to students' topic interests, and multi-use since they can not only be used for language study, but also for a number of other activities as well.

Video as part of a lesson

As Harmer (2001) said, we can use a video extract as one component in a longer lesson sequence, whether to illustrate the topic we are working on, to highlight language points, or to settle a class after a noisy activity [6].

Topic: we will often be able to introduce a short two-or three-minute video extract into a lesson devoted to a particular topic. If students are working on a reading text about genetically modified food and animals, for example, we might

show a quick interview clip with a government minister, or a quick burst of a news bulletin about campaigners against genetic modification.

Language: when a class is working on an area of language, whether grammatical, functional, lexical- or a mixture of all three-the lesson can be greatly enhanced by video extract which shows that language in operation. Video extracts can be used to introduce new language, practice already known items, or analyze the language used in certain typical exchanges and genres.

Relaxation: video can occasionally be used for relaxation, but this use must not be overdone since, as we have said, we usually need to make it an active process. But we might show/play a music video at the end of a long lesson or show a quick bit of video film about a place or a person as a bridge between, for example, a noisy activity and a quiet one.

Practical considerations

Watching video films for language learning purposes should be an active process by learners. Yet, most language learners will be experienced in passive television viewing as domestic viewing tends to be passive. The supported materials made by teacher or supplied with the films should encourage positive viewing by the learners [6].

Loneran (1992) suggested that video use in the language classroom be in small doses, no more than 5 minutes at a time, and be focused on a single task such as vocabulary recognition. She also asked teachers to look into the use of both prepared video materials and classroom developed videos involving student performance. Although video presentations are stimulating, and usually capture the interest of viewers, it is disappointing for learners to unable to follow a sequence because of language difficulties [10].

Video tasks should be multi-layered in order to exploit all information and elements contained in the aural and visual texts. Additionally, it is essential that video tasks and lessons be perceived by the language leaner as a challenging and requiring effort. Be sure that students are able to answer questions based solely upon what they see instead of what they hear. Otherwise it is possible to imply that practitioners are measuring their visual literacy and not their ability to comprehend aural input [3]. Canning (1998) stated that with the increase in educational technology, video is no longer imprisoned in the traditional classroom. It is recommended that institutions and practitioners encourage the use of instructional video in the F/SL classroom as it enables them to monitor and alternate instruction by fostering greater mental effort for active learning instead of passive retrieval of visual and auditory information (cited in Nation, 1994).

Conclusion

Although recent years have been an increasing volume of literature on audiovisual aids and language teaching, there has recently been very little research into suitability and effectiveness of the media for this purpose. However, there have been studies in other fields notably, educational broadcasting research and communication studies, which though set in the domain of the first language acquisition and comprehension, may have relevance for English language teaching. With one or two notable exceptions, no one appears to be considering one of the main questions arising from the widespread of audio and audio-visual aids as a source of language input to the foreign language learner.

Davies and Pears (2003) claimed that it is becoming more and more difficult to motivate a class with just chalk and talk or a textbook only [3]. Pupils know that language lives in sound and color, because students experience it every day outside the classroom. We, as English language teachers, need to take up this challenge and recognize the importance of teaching aids.

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