BEST PRACTICES IN USING VIDEO TECHNOLOGY
TO PROMOTE SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract

Inclusion of technology in the process of second language acquisition has always been a priority for both teachers and theoreticians. This paper reviews the current trends in using video-based language instruction in K-12 educational settings. Although it has been demonstrated for many years that the use of video as an instructional medium provides unique learning qualities, it has not been entirely embraced by high school English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. Furthermore, recent advancements of digital video (low cost equipment and editing software) and Web-based video sharing services provide remarkable possibilities for supporting a variety of learning activities in ESL classrooms. Yet, classroom practice in using video technology has not gone too far beyond simple viewing and listening to video content for eliciting discussion among ESL students.

This paper particularly highlights the role of video in the process of improving student pronunciation and presentation skills. The authors described a week-long classroom video-based project conducted at a Midwestern High School. The best examples of classroom practices and student activities were discussed. The most prominent observations of this project were that the video-based ESL activities contributed to the overall learning motivation and the enhancement of pronunciation skills. Finally, the authors discuss some potential issues and instructional implications of utilizing video technology in K-12 settings.

Keywords: ESL, language acquisition, video technology, pronunciation, presentation skills

1. Introduction

The number of English as Second Language Learners (ESL) is rapidly increasing in secondary schools in the United States. Particularly, it is interesting to note that English

language teachers have been one the first educators who have embraced technological advancements for supporting language learning since early 80's (Delcloque, 2000; Warschauer, & Meskill, 2000). Throughout the last three decades, a variety of technologies including computers, audio, and video devices have become an integral part of language learning in many institutions of higher educational.

However, a comprehensive review of the current body of literature (Gruba et al., 2009; Başoğlu & Akdemir, 2010, etc.) indicates that learning technologies are primarily a part of language curricula in higher education, while in K-12 education settings technology is not as present as could be expected in the digital age of today. With regard to video technology, lack of systematic and organized approaches in integrating this type of educational media in schools is very apparent. As argued by Rhodes and Pufahl (2011), there are a small number of officially evaluated video-based programs to date. Furthermore, a body of literature (Ortiz et al., 2012; Wagener, 2006; White et al., 2000, etc.) shows that investigation and in-depth analysis of the advantages of the instructional use of video technology is in its initial phase. The literature also suggests that the integration of video in classroom activities only at an elementary level with arbitrary selection of teaching methods may diminish a full extent of learning effectiveness.

For instance, two studies carried out by Ortiz et al. (2012) and Wagener (2006) clearly indicate a strong necessity for more empirical research in this area. Ortiz et al. (2012) focused their work on the efficacy of video self-modeling (VSM) to increase fluency and pronunciation for English language learners. Their study demonstrated that video has potential to improve reading fluency by allowing the students to see themselves performing with and without errors. According to Ortiz and his collaborators, reading is a critical skill for all language students, and it is an imperative for teachers and school personnel to have a rudimentary understanding of the video-based language learning process in order to avoid creating incorrect conclusions. Lastly, based on the findings, they recommended that the use of video self-modeling in the area of language learning "has yet to be evaluated with ELL's" (Ortiz et al., 2012, p.28). In the same vein Wagener's (2006) study highlighted the importance of available digital video resources for language learners. One of the main research variables in this study was associated with the student accomplishment in listening and translating skills, as well as vocabulary

acquisition. This research showed the positive implications of using video technology in the language classroom. Instructional video materials significantly contributed to the development of all the three observed aspects: listening, translating skills, and student's vocabulary. Although the study findings confirmed the benefits of digital video, the authors expressed serious concerns that this approach has not been fully explored and utilized in the learning process.

Another study conducted by White et al. (2000) recognized the multiple instructional advantages of video in comparison to printed materials, such as rich visual support, audio component, enhanced contextualization, and better control over the medium (slow motion play or possibility to record student voice). However, the authors also noticed that little research has been conducted to validate these commonly embraced values of video technology.

As such, English language teachers have relatively limited insights into scientific explanations of the educational potential and benefits of utilizing video technology in classroom settings. Thus, the purpose of this paper emphasizes the best practices of advanced video technology integration in teaching English language in a K-12 classroom, focusing on using video to improve pronunciation and overall student presentation skills. The application of this project's results might not be limited to the area of English language instruction only. They may be beneficial for all instructors regardless of the language taught in the school. Undoubtedly, the instructional qualities of video technology extend beyond a particular field of study, such as English as a Second Language.

2. Video technology based language learning

The omnipresence of video technology has never been more obvious than in the lives of the 21st century students. The advancement of technology makes affordable a range of different digital devices. The literature confirms an increasing trend of using a variety of digital devices among high school and college students (Chinnery, 2006; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2007). Even a brief look into an ordinary classroom provides substantial evidence that the majority of high school learners own some type of PDA (personal digital assistant) such as smartphones, e-books, dictionaries, iPods, iPads or tablets.

Typically, these PDA's comprise multiple functions, including the capabilities for video and/or voice recording. Undoubtedly today's students, including language learners, are exposed to video content on a daily basis in their life environment. Yet, it seems that the school environment still has not fully integrated video technology in the classroom routine and language learning activities. In Masats et.al.'s (2009) view video has never had "a prominent role in language leaning and, if used, it has been regarded as a tool to design 'filling-in' activities" (p. 344).

However, the instructional value of video should not be underestimated. In comparison to the printed instructional materials (e.g. textbook, dictionaries, worksheets, etc.) video content provides learners with an additional quality, which may be critical for boosting second language acquisition. The quality of being able to hear and see synchronous communication, communicators' gestures, gazes, paralinguistic cues, facial expressions, and lip movements are very important. For example, Swaffar and Vlatten (1997) argue that video is a multi-sensory medium, which significantly contributes to the overall student involvement in the learning process. All of these additional elements help language students to more easily grasp the meaning of the spoken language between two or more communicators. Other authors (Herron, et. al., 1995; Hişmanoğlu, 2006; Weyers, 1999) also reported that video technology can support learning efforts by improving long-term listening comprehension skills, student confidence, and pronunciation proficiency.

A comprehensive literature analysis concerning integration of video technology in second language learning supports the notion that slow, but interesting, evolutionary approaches in using video is evolving in classroom practice. Thus, with regard to the extent of students' engagement in using video as instructional media, three levels of video integration can be identified in the teaching and learning process (Brooke, 2003; Dal, 2010; Shrosbree, 2008; Masats, et.al. 2009). Undoubtedly, each of these three levels of video integration in ESL classroom activities has certain instructional values.

At the first, basic level, video materials can be used for simple viewing and listening to the foreign language content to elicit discussions or communication in the classroom. Listening and watching videos provide an opportunity for students to hear accurate pronunciation of words and sentences as they are spoken by the native English speakers. According to Masats et.al. (2009), at this level video materials constitute "rich

and authentic input environments as they offer learners the opportunity of observing the dynamics of interaction (discourse modes, gazes, gestures, registers, paralinguistic cues, etc.) in context" (p.344). However, these three authors also regarded the approach of using video as a tool to design *filling-in* activities which have, to some extent, the limited impact on promoting students' classroom engagement. As such, these activities are typically labeled as more passive than as engaging elements of the ESL classroom practice (Dal, 2010).

Using video technology for self-reflection, assessment of learning accomplishments, and supporting hands-on class assignments may be considered as the next level of video integration in the language learning process. Video-based assignments extend beyond passive video watching by requiring students to interact and respond to the video content. For instance, after watching the video students are asked to complete follow-up exercises or answer questions about the presented video materials. Utilizing video for self-reflection and assessment is becoming a more traditional approach for taking advantages of this medium in ESL instruction. Video recordings can be used as a powerful tool for analyzing students' pronunciation errors and providing constructive feedback. This process can take several different formats such as self, peer, and teacher assessment or feedback. Additionally, video recordings can serve as an excellent medium, evidence for tracking learning progress over an extensive period of time. Finally, it would be remiss not to note that recent studies (Mekheime, 2011; Maclean & White, 2007; Joseph, & Baskaran, 2011) indicate a strong motivational role of video technology in ESL instruction.

Recent advancement of digital video technology has resulted in a tremendous potential for onsite recording and editing video in a classroom environment. Low-cost digital video cameras, user friendly video editing software such as *iMovie*, and free web-based video hosting (e.g. *TeacherTube* or *YouTube*), have made the entire process of video production and post-production much easier. The highest level of using video technology in ESL classroom involves language students as creators of a video script and video materials by themselves. In Shrosbree's (2008) view, the presence of the following common elements underlines student-made video approaches: periods for planning the video (writing a script), working on language aspects (vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.),

movie production (recording, editing, and publishing), and showing/critiquing the completed video. Furthermore, the author highlights that this approach is one of the most effective ways for promoting collaborative learning and communication among language students.

As both ESL theory and classroom practice show, the affordances of video technology are unquestionable. From passive viewing to the student production of video materials, there are a whole array of techniques and methods for including video technology in classroom learning and teaching. Finally, from the aforementioned discussion, it may be concluded that the magnitude of video-based language instruction is proportional to the extent of students' engagement or interaction with the video materials. Additionally, it seems that an appropriate selection of teaching methods related to the use of video technology supports student's efforts in the process of learning foreign language.

Thus, the research question addressed in the present study was as follows:

- Does video make a difference in achieving pronunciation proficiency and improving presentation skills in an ESL classroom?

Pronunciation and presentational skills can be challenging to develop, yet they can become essential and fundamental parts of being a successful language learner. Many ESL students are required to do oral presentations in their general education classes on a regular basis, which can be a terrifying experience for a beginner-level language learner. Role playing and video production can be very helpful tools in achieving these goals. Camera recordings provide an opportunity for students to practice these skills in an enjoyable, challenging, and relatively low anxiety atmosphere of group work, as well as viewing and reflecting on their personal communication.

3. The study

3.1 Project description and examples of classroom practice

The purpose of this classroom project was to explore the best practices of using video technology in learning English as a second language at the secondary school level. Particularly, the project focused on describing and analyzing the potential of short video recordings in promoting two critical aspects of language learning: pronunciation and

presentation skills.

ESL students at a Midwestern High School (USA) participated in this non-research End-of-the-Unit classroom project. The students were level-two students, which coincides with low intermediate level of language proficiency. The goal of the class was to increase students' language proficiency in four critical domains: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The teacher used a randomly chosen text about Influenza that was available online. During that time the flu season was just about to begin. In addition, there was a threat of a new, H1N1, virus. Through informal observations and in-class conversations with the students the teacher learned that some students were not familiar with the flu virus and were not aware of the precautions that can be taken to protect themselves from getting sick. As a result, the text about Influenza was located and a project was designed to teach students language skills using the content of this article.

The project involved several steps which included: pre-videotaping activities, videotaping, and post-project analysis. In the beginning, the article was read and discussed with students, highlighting unknown vocabulary words. After that, students were introduced to the concept of three-paragraph writing and composed an essay on Influenza prevention. As an extension of this unit, they were put into groups of four to conduct a video project, using *i-Movie* software for video-recording the entire period of practicing presentational and pronunciation skills.

The planning stages of this project included meeting with the building's media library specialist, who was also a certified instructional technology (IT) teacher, to discuss the options. It was decided to divide this project into several parts. First, the teachers introduced this project to their students by role-playing a situation about one of the school rules. Then, they used a storyboard to model the process of recording the sequence of events in their charts. Next, all groups were asked to design their own charts. They had to choose one influenza prevention tip from the text and role play right/wrong ways of the prevention techniques. For example, one group used sneezing as a way to introduce the concept. Their story took place in a classroom. One of the students walked pretending to be sick and sneezed without covering his mouth with the sleeve. Several days later they showed that their class was half empty because students got sick.

Once the students were done with their action sequencing, they were asked to assign roles and start practicing. The teachers walked around and helped students as needed. Two days later all the groups were asked to take turns and role play their stories in front of each other. The teachers elicited feedback from the students in terms of positive things and aspects of their skits that needed improvement.

Following the practice, the teams videotaped the students with the help of the media specialist. Then, the raw footage was shown to students and they were told that they can redo their videos if they are not satisfied with the first attempt. The majority of the groups decided to redo their videos for the following reason: they all decided that they needed more practice to improve pronunciation and presentational skills. After the groups were done, the videos were assembled in DVDs by the media specialist. With regard to the video-editing procedure, the media specialist used *iMovie '08* video-editing software, which is a part of the *iLife* suite, a popular *Apple Macintosh* product since 2003.

An example of one of the videos that students created to show the video patterns is described below. Three students participated by playing roles having lunch at the school cafeteria. One of the students pretended that she was sick and sneezed without covering her mouth. A couple of days later the rest of the students "got sick". At the end of the video, the students stressed that in order to stay healthy one should always sneeze in their sleeves. The other videos followed the same pattern: role play the "what not to do" situation and then make it right at the end of the videos.

3.2. Lesson learned: Project results and gained experiences

At the end of the project, the teachers devoted a period of one class to a celebration of learning. Final videos were shown and students spent time discussing this project. After several attempts the majority of the students improved some parts of their pronunciation problems through interaction with their peers and feedback from their teachers. Watching videos increased their motivation to improve pronunciation and presentation skills because they wanted their final product to look good. On many occasions teachers did not even have to ask students to redo their videos. At this stage of the process students are usually highly motivated to do it on their own before final publishing. Any time students

are actively involved in their own learning processes; it enhances their motivation and therefore improves the end result.

The videos were shown to students as a part of the final step of this project. The viewing triggered many insightful comments from them in terms of their performance. All students commented that their final products were much better compared to their original ones due to extensive practice.

Another lesson that was learned during this classroom project is that although students, for the most part, don't like to be videotaped, at the end, the majority of them also commented that it was an important learning experience.

3.5. Potential issues and classroom implications

The implications of this theory into practice classroom project are important from the teachers as well as from the language learners stand point. The integration of video technology might be applicable not just to the process of English language acquisition but in learning and teaching any other language. When students watch themselves on camera, they tend to invest more time in practicing pronunciation and presentation skills. This project seems to have benefitted both students and teachers.

From the students' standpoint, the study tended to increase their motivation and involve them actively in the learning process. Learning a language involves speaking, interaction and presentation of information. Based on the anecdotal notes, the more students produce output, the more they apply language, receive teacher feedback and therefore, improve their language skills.

From the instructor's standpoint: this project is an example of a student-centered approach that motivates learners and increases their language skills. Students are always eager to work with technology since it is such a large part of their daily lives. According to the anecdotal observations of both teachers, learners enjoy being actively involved in the learning process. They like interacting with other students and working on hands-on projects.

During the project implementation, the instructor encountered a wide array of technical issues. These issues may be generally divided in the four following groups: IT

support, access to video equipment, video production, required time, and facilities. These will be briefly addressed one by one below.

IT support: Projects that involve the use of technology require extensive support on the part of the IT specialists. In this case, the project benefitted tremendously from the certified IT teacher, who was also heavily involved in the planning process.

Video production: Observations showed that the processes of video pre-production, production, and post-production may require significant amounts of time. It takes time to shoot videos, since it sometimes involves repeating this process several times due to students' requests. After the videos are done, they need to be downloaded to the computer and then processed. Afterwards, they are to be compiled together and burned on DVDs. All these steps take time and it is difficult for some teachers to do these steps without IT support.

Access to video equipment: During this project, at least five digital cameras with external microphones were used for shooting video. In addition, laptops with *iMovie* video-editing software and DVD burners were needed for its completion.

Required time and facilities: In addition to the technology equipment, this project required sufficient amount of instructional time. Originally, it was planned to complete it within a week, however, it was extended after we ran into some technical problems and also due to students' requests to have some additional practice. Videotaping also required special sound proof rooms to eliminate external noise, which could have interfered with the quality of the movies.

These anecdotal observations are consistent with some of the claims found in literature. The abovementioned issues should be useful for other teachers to implement this process more efficiently.

4. Further directions in project development

Based on anecdotal observations, this project was a successful example of using technology when teaching foreign languages, which was noted through students' comments and final products. The next steps could involve using more advanced video technology to produce high quality movies. Furthermore, additional time may be invested in providing basic video editing training for ESL students. Current advancement of the

video technology provides more user friendly video editing software interface which may motive students to be engaged in all phases (video pre-production, production, and post-production) on video integration in language classroom curriculum.

Furthermore, another challenging area for further exploration refers to the emerging technologies such as PDAs and web-based video editors. An effective application of these new technologies in education has become a pivotal research goal for many educators (Churchill & Churchill, 2008; Blackall, 2008). For instance, Godwin-Jones (2011) indicates that current personal digital assistance devices have the capacity to process video content successfully. By using PDAs students are able to do video recording (including audio recording), playback video footages, watch streaming video clips, and even upload video content to the Web. Current simplicity in web editing and sharing video content opens practically unlimited possibilities for integration of vide in language learning and taking in-class activities beyond the school walls.

5. Conclusion

Technology is an essential part of the educational world and, if used properly, can effectively promote successful language acquisition. One part of being a successful language learner is to be able to pronounce words correctly, which can a very challenging task for some students. Role playing is one of the techniques that has been used by teachers for a long time and which engages students in active language use. By videotaping students role-playing various situations and using *i-Movie* video-editing software to create videos, teachers provided the students with an opportunity to practice pronunciation and presentation skills through active participation. Through informal observations, it seems that the integration of this type of technology increased students' motivation and provided them with feedback on their language skills.

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