Literacy and Software Features in Foreign Language Teaching

Yiran Li, M.A.
Cheongju University
yiranliyiran@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9563-6594
Branko Medic, D.Sc.
Manchester University, the United Kingdom
medic.tesol@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1937-0947

Introduction

The digital world permeates every aspect of our lives. We use our phones and laptops for several hours each day. We watch television to relax and connect with our wider social network using the internet. It's only natural then, that digital technologies are becoming more and more embedded within classrooms. Teachers have found that, when used purposefully, technology can be a useful tool to enhance learning outcomes.

As a foreign language teacher for college age students, I choose to use digital technologies in a mindful, meaningful way. I have found that blogs and wikis can play a powerful role in enhancing my student's written language skills and their collaboration with each other. Another digital medium that I recognize that can play a large role in enhancing my students' foreign language learning is videos. The visual format of videos allows students to pick up from visual cues and connect the words that are being spoken to meaning thereby building on students' vocabulary in the language the video is in. When captions are activated, students can either use subtitles to build on their reading skills or read the subtitles in their own language to understand better about what is happening

As a teacher whose practices are informed by pedagogy, theory and research, I recognise that it is important to look to relevant academic literature to help me design my curriculum and teaching plans. While I practically and instinctively recognise the benefits of videos on foreign language learning, I have undertaken a literature review to help deepen my pedagogical knowledge. In this paper, I conduct a literature review and evaluate how findings of this review reposition my perspectives and will further impact my practices.

Literature Review

As early as 1981, Tomalin recognised the benefits that videos can have in the second language classroom. Videos "motivate learners, bring the real world into the classroom, contextualise language naturally, and enable learners to experience authentic language. Students like it because video presentations are interesting, challenging and stimulating to watch"(Tomalin, 1981 as cited in Bajrami and Ismaili, 2016). Since Tomalin made his argument, there have been several studies and additional research papers which support the ideas he presented.

For instance, in line with Tomalin's argument that videos allow learners to experience authentic language, Bajrami and Ismaili, 2016 assert that videos can help students build on their listening comprehension. Through watching and listening to situations where authentic language is used, students build on their ability to understand the spoken foreign language. Bajrami and Ismaili (2016) add that this is particularly useful, because language may have different nuances and grammatical features in its spoken form as compared to its written form. As a result of listening to videos, students can improve their grasp over understanding the spoken form.

It is not simply listening to videos that can help build on students' skill in the foreign language they are learning. Winke, Gass and Sydorenko (2013) explore the impact that captioning videos can have on students foreign language learning. They studied one hundred and fifty foreign language learners in a Midwestern university in the USA. These students were learning a variety of second languages including Spanish, Russian, and Chinese. They compared the impact of captions videos versus non captioned videos on students' language learning and found that captioned videos aid novel vocabulary learning. Their study also found that when students are shown a captioned video in their first viewing followed by a non-captioned video in their second viewing, they were more likely to transfer the understanding they had gained from the captions into the second viewing. Presenting videos in two viewings was also found to reduce learner anxiety and promote attention and learning.

In addition to their findings, an important conclusion that Winke et al (2013) draw is that it is important that students use both form focused and meaning focused strategies when viewing videos with captions. In form focused viewing, students use captions to improve their understanding of, and therefore their attention to the video content. In meaning focused viewing, they go one step further, recording the information they gain through paying attention through note taking. When engaging in meaning focused viewing,a student may take notes on new vocabulary they have learned or a cultural nuance that they have understood more deeply as a result of the captions. Using both these strategies will help students retain the linguistic and cultural knowledge they have gained for a longer amount of time. These findings will be important for me to translate into my teaching practice and use the results of this study to guide students as they engage with videos within my own classroom.

Tomalin's assertion that videos contextualise language naturally is also supported by more recent papers. Elola and Oskoz (2008) suggest that, aside from learning the vocabulary and technical aspects of a language, it is also important for students to build on their knowledge of the culture behind the language they are studying. Bajrami and Ismaili (2016) argue that videos provide an apt way to do this. Videos, especially movies in the foreign language that students are learning, include stories about culture and cultural cues that students can learn from. Sherman (2003) presents a similar argument, highlighting that there are large bodies of video materials created across the world that can seamlessly be incorporated into foreign language lessons.

While a majority of the studies that have been discussed so far focus on the impact of videos in general on foreign language learning, it is important to consider the impact that different types of videos have on learning. Cinganotto and Cuccurollo (2015) argue that "the internet is an archive of 20th century footage and moving images, most of them imported from TV: excerpts from documentaries (nature, history, science art), interviews, news reports, weather reports, historic videos, etc." From this, one can see that there is a wide range of genres and types of videos; analysing the impact of each of these videos would be out of the scope of this literature review. However, one can consider some of the most popular and easily accessible types of videos. For instance, Terantino (2011) posits that YouTube can be used in a variety of ways to enhance foreign language learning.It can be used to find videos in lesser used foreign languages and also used to find authentic content from the countries that speak the language the students are learning. This content can be more authentic and situated as compared to pure language instructional videos. YouTube can also be used for collaboration between students in different countries that are attempting to learn each others' languages.

While viewing videos is arguably the primary way of learning from them, the role of making videos should also be considered. Pisarenko (2017) suggests that students be encouraged to create their own videos, using the foreign language they are learning. As well as having the actors within the video speaking the foreign language, the 'working language' while shooting the video must also be the foreign language (although this may be better suited for more advanced foreign language classes). In doing this, students collaboratively work together to create, edit and shoot scripts in the language they are learning. The creative nature of this work may increase learner motivation and thereby improve their learning (Pisarenko,2017). This was evidenced in a study conducted by Engin (2014). In this study, a 'flipped classroom' approach was adopted. Students were instructed to construct a video tutorial on an aspect of academic writing in English, which they were learning as a foreign language. The students in this study were between 19-21 whose first language was Arabic and who were learning English as a second language. It found that, in the process of 'producing' the videos, students learned more about the structure of English academic writing as they were more motivated to research the information they needed for their content. From this, one can conclude that when considering how best to incorporate videos within a classroom, one should consider students as the producers of videos as well as the

viewers. By becoming the producers of a video, students' motivation and learning may improve significantly.

Raised Awareness

An examination of literature about the role of videos in foreign language learning shows that videos can play a major role in learning. This supports the ideas that I had posited in this paper's introduction. However, the literature review also shows that when teachers incorporate videos within their classroom, they must have a carefully constructed, international approach.Bajrami and Ismaili (2016) argue that watching videos should not be a passive activity. Instead, teachers should design tasks connected to the video viewing that aim to build on students' reading, writing, speaking and listening capacity. It will be important for teachers to play an active role in student's engagement with videos. In the next part of this paper, I consider the pedagogical strategies to incorporate the use of videos within my classroom.

Possible Interventions

Pisarenko (2015) designed a pedagogical algorithm to support the use of video technologies in a foreign language learning classroom. First, students viewing the video input both the foreign language and the cultural information that the video is conveying. Then, they process the information and then use it to formulate both foreign language and culture competence. Finally, they integrate their learning and actualise their new language and cultural competence.

In order to assist students as they progress through these processes, Pisarenko (2017) suggests that teachers use different stages when using videos. First, Pisarenko (2017) states that a teacher should start with a previewing stage. In this stage, the teacher should introduce the purpose of the viewing and the scope of the work that will follow. The scope of work is considered to be the reason why students are viewing the video. For instance, when conducting fact-finding viewing, where students are directed to find the main facts or gain a general understanding of the video. This does not require them to go in depth or to understand every linguistic nuance or word used. The other type of viewing is studying viewing. Here, the scope of work requires the viewing to be more in depth and students will have a more defined scope of work where they have to answer specific questions and analyse information presented in the video in several ways.

As well as identifying and detailing the scope of work, the teacher should also introduce any lexical or grammatical difficulties that may emerge while viewing the video and also introduce any specific cultural or social phenomena that the students will encounter in the video.

The previewing stage is followed by the video information presentation, where the video is viewed. Depending on the length and the format of the video, the video information presentation may occur a few times. During the information presenting stage, it may be important for teachers to divide the video into different viewing cycles, where the video is paused at different stages to allow students time to process, discuss and clarify information

(Nunan,   2003).

The final stage is the after viewing, where students build on their language and cultural competence. The after viewing stage may include collaborative oral discussions, questions and answers, plot and character analyses and will include fulfilling the scope of work that has been identified. Bajrami and Ismaili (2016) suggests a range of after viewing tasks that can build on the students' foreign language capacity. These include exercises centre around grammar and lexicon concepts that may have been observed in the video, asking students to debate or present on topics that were explored in the video or on the characters or plot.

When designing my curriculum, it will therefore be important for me to selectively choose videos that will best promote learning. When choosing these videos, I will consider how they may enable students to fulfill Pisarenko's pedagogical algorithm and also, in my lesson plan allow specific times for the previewing, the video information presentation and the after viewing stages.

In addition to helping me further develop my understanding of a pedagogical approach to bring videos into my classroom, another important concern raised by this literature review is that different genres may impact the kind and quality of learning that occurs. While the scope of this paper and a limited time frame did not allow me to conduct an in depth analysis of the impact of different types of videos, it is a topic that I will conduct further studies on. A further analysis of this topic will help me further develop my pedagogical approach and ensure best outcomes for my students.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, this paper has shown that videos irrefutably enhance students' learning of foreign languages. Teachers should carefully consider the best way to incorporate videos within their lessons; this may include encouraging students to both view and produce videos. In utilising videos in different ways and from a range of different contexts, teachers will ensure that learning is authentic, accessible and impactful.

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