An Analysis of Research Regarding Video-based Instruction as a Language Learning Tool

言語学習ツールとしてのビデオベースの指導に関する研究の分析

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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly examines the use of video in the language-learning classroom. It begins by looking at the most frequently referenced theories that support the use of video, as well as examining studies that demonstrate its effectiveness, both in a primary and an auxiliary role. It is hypothesized that video can be utilized as an instructional tool that does not require a teacher to disseminate additional information about the material in order for the student to still reap benefits. An analysis of previous research and studies into the realm of video-based instruction offers support and criticism of this hypothesis.

KEYWORDS: Video-based language learning instruction, Television and movies as comprehensible input

1. INTRODUCTION

There are numerous stories of people claiming to learn English at home by watching television shows like "Friends" (Hunt, 2019). Video offers great benefits as a form of comprehensible input and is frequently used in the language learning classroom environment. Ranging from materials prepared specifically for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to videos authentically produced for the purpose of entertaining or informing native speakers of a language, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) teachers have been utilizing video with various pedagogical intents and with varying levels of success leading to the question: to what extent can it be effectively utilized? Are anecdotal examples of learners acquiring a language by watching videos supported by positive results from quantifiable evidence? The goal of the paper is to examine previous SLA studies that have used a video-based curriculum to analyze why and how the material was employed and what effect it had on students' language acquisition. It will gauge what levels of quantitative evidence exist to lend credence to the idea that a person can learn a foreign language with only videos to serve in the role of 'teacher'. In attempting to determine this, the paper will hopefully shed light on some of the potential pitfalls that exist as well as the dangers that this pedagogical system would inherently encounter.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Most studies regarding video's efficacy are based on similar theoretical underpinnings. Many proponents of using video in the classroom reference one or more of the following theories as the fundamental explanation of their practices.

2.1 Stephen Krashen

The primary justification for video's use is most frequently quoted in the works of Stephen Krashen (1985), whose basic beliefs surrounding second language acquisition processes are described in his theories of "comprehensible input" and "affective filter".

2.1.1 The Input Hypothesis

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) suggests that for learners to acquire a language the most important factor is that there should be significant exposure to the language at a level slightly beyond their current proficiency. This level, which Krashen calls "i + 1", must largely consist of material that the learner will understand in order to provide sufficient context, yet also include an unspecified amount of new material that will challenge the learner's capacity to draw conclusions as to what its meaning entails. It is Krashen's assertion that given enough comprehensible input, language acquisition is bound to occur, as long as the learner is open to it. In point of fact, input is not only the most important element, but essentially the only one necessary for language acquisition to occur. Given the numerous amount of video that exists, with proper care, materials can be selected that fit the requisite "*i + 1*" level.

2.1.2 Affective Filter Hypothesis

The affective filter is another major component in Krashen's theory of language acquisition. In order for a learner's mind to be susceptible to language acquisition, the learner must have appropriate levels of motivation and stress in the learning environment. If the learner is subjected to too much anxiety or insufficient levels of desire to acquire language, then the mind will not become engaged enough to accept the input, no matter how comprehensible it would appear to be. Video can provide the relaxing environment necessary for the affective filter to allow for acquisition.

2.2 Motivation

Motivation is not only an essential part of Krashen's theory, but also appears as an integral part of other theorists' work, including Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Dornyei (2001). In addition to being shown to increase motivation levels, video fosters the growth of two related learner qualities, autonomy and self-confidence.

2.2.1 Autonomy

Motivated learners often have more involvement in their educational process, an aspect that video use facilitates. They are able to independently work with materials outside of the classroom, allowing for increased exposure and engagement with the target language (Lonergan, 1984).

2.2.2 Confidence

As learners experience the benefits associated with video use, they are typically instilled with increased levels of self-efficacy and the confidence that they can succeed in their efforts to learn the target language (Kerridge, 1982).

2.3 Listening Comprehension

Many language acquisition theorists and practitioners agree that an important aspect of language learning, and comprehensible input in general, is that students get plenty of opportunity to practice listening to materials in order to simulate that portion of the input/output nature of the communicative process.

2.3.1 Playability

Video can be played as many times as desired without a loss of currency. It can also be paused, slowed, sped up, and parsed in any number of ways that can be beneficial to the learner (Tomalin, 1986).

2.3.2 Focus

The screen is a natural draw for the learner's eyes, and provides a definite focal point for the eyes (Geddes, 1982). This helps learners stay on task while listening/watching.

2.3.3 Paralinguistic Features and Other Visual Aids

Visual clues from the speakers including gesture, facial expressions, and even posture and speaker proximity can aid learners in their interpretation of what is being conveyed (Geddes, 1982). The camera can also serve as a "spotlight" to draw the viewer's eyes to supportive visual information. This can aid in comprehension as long as the visuals do not distract students or detract from the message (Tomalin, 1986).

2.3.4 Subtitles

Subtitles can provide a positive impact for language acquisition by making video-based information more comprehensible (Grimmer, 1982). Katchen (2003) explores subtitle use in her study at National Tsing Hua University on the effectiveness of using video for intermediate and advanced-level English learners. She refers to a 1998 study by McNeill that indicated that while students who used L1 captions scored better on comprehension tests, both L1 and L2 versions provided positive results for increased comprehension. She notes that students who used L2 captioning tested better at vocabulary acquisition and that "while L1 captions aided comprehension, these students could also ignore the audio input of English."

2.4 Context and Authenticity

The principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) ascribe to the necessity of the student understanding not just the denotative meanings of the language, but also the more obtuse and variable connotative manners in which language is used. Situational authenticity is an important principle of CLT theory. Video offers a wide variety of

entertaining, realistic "slices of life" to appeal to a number of different sensibilities (Allan, 1985). It reveals how different language is utilized to achieve similar goals depending upon variables such as formality, and the speaker's familiarity with the listener. As the numerous varieties of "World Englishes" display, 'culture' is another element that can affect what a speaker says, or how they choose to say it. Video can authentically display how to use language in specific settings (Lonergan, 1984) and it also can provide learners an opportunity to observe the target L2 culture in the classroom in a way that would typically be unattainable (Tschirner, 2001).

3. POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

There are a number of issues that have been pointed out by theorists and practitioners of video use that should be paid attention to.

3.1 Authentic Versus Contrived Materials

An important distinction exists between contrived videos, those that have been specifically produced for use in an SLA environment, and authentic materials, which can ostensibly be defined as everything else.

Contrived videos typically lack an ability to engage their audience and run the risk of being boring unless they are narrative in nature and have extraordinary effort placed on their production values (South, Gabbitas & Merrill, 2008). Engagement, which is an important element of Krashen's affective filter, is helpful for sustaining learner motivation, suggesting that contrived videos, although beneficial for targeting specific language elements and providing teachers with relevant tasks and exercises, are less desirable than authentic materials unless they are exceedingly well-produced. However if the videos are too visually entertaining or relaxing there is a risk that the lack of an overt demand for active listening skills will detract from the learning process (Lonergan, 1984).

A related concern is that the use of authentic materials, which have not been specifically designed for foreign language learners, may require substantial teacher preparation. Although many contrived materials offer pre-prepared exercises to accompany the video, teachers using authentic sources might have to prepare appropriately sized video selections and accompanying exercises that can address whatever target language is being studied.

3.2 Additional Issues

Ariew (1987) rightfully points out that video is by nature a one-way medium that lacks communicative interaction; however Tomalin (1986) suggests that there are ways to make "interactive" contrived materials that challenge the learner with tasks.

A more pressing issue may be that non-contextualized visuals can lead to confuse or distract the viewer from the language (Tomalin, 1986). Most importantly, many theorists will attest that the use of video is an aid at best, and cannot serve as a methodology or a replacement for the teacher (Geddes, 1982; Kerridge, 1982; Lonergan, 1984; Tomalin, 1986). It should be noted, however, that this position appears to be merely a widely accepted assumption, as no evidence is given as to why these opinions exist.

4. STUDIES IN VIDEO-BASED LEARNING

There are a number of studies regarding the usefulness of video as a teaching mechanism. This section examines a few of the most pertinent, viewed in terms of the amount of importance that video proffers to the educational methods, from least to most.

4.1 Video as an Auxiliary Teaching Aid

The most common technique is to use video as a form of teaching aid. This is in line with the common thinking that it can be used only to assist a teacher, not take the place of one. The following studies show unqualified support for video in these circumstances.

4.1.1 German in New Zealand

Antonie Alm (2008) presents her work at the University of Otago utilizing German soap operas as the primary source of language input and cultural contact for her students. Although proficiency gains are not tested for, results indicate a definite improvement in learner motivation levels.

4.1.2 Spanish in Florida

In 1991, a group of local teachers addressed the possibilities of utilizing video in the classrooms (Darst, 1991). This pedagogical examination also utilized heavy amounts of teacher-prepared language integration techniques to accompany the video input, but came to the conclusions that "grammar indeed can be taught just as effectively with video materials, given the proper preparation, as can vocabulary and usage… any aspect of Spanish language acquisition can be taught efficiently with video materials of natural, authentic Spanish" (p. 1089).

4.1.3 French at the University of Colorado, Denver

A 1988 study done by Jeanne Manning claims to use video as a primary text. Although the French newscasts shown in class are apparently the major source of input that the students were provided, there are also large amounts of teacher provided preparation and integration activities, including a student produced video. Although the study was small in scope and scale, the participants' "improvement in fluency in French was easily observable" (p. 460).

4.1.4 English in Taiwan and Turkey

Of the studies classified as "Auxiliary" use of video in the classroom, Katchen's (2003) and Bal-Gezegin's (2014) studies come closest to inclusion in the next group of "Primary". Katchen does not really mention how much additional teaching is done by other sources, but reference is made to the teacher preparing additional materials and administering tests. The assumption is that the teacher is still active in this setting. Although precise gains are not measured, the conclusion is reached that DVD film can be used for a language course's input material.

In a study involving pre-intermediate university students learning English at a university in Turkey, Bal-Gezegin explored the quantitative and qualitative differences

between students learning practical English phrases via video and audio-only methodologies (Bal-Gezegin, 2014). It is unclear if these phrases are introduced or reinforced by other methods, hence the inclusion of this study in this section for video as an auxiliary teaching aid. Video-based learners not only displayed significantly higher levels of acquisition and retention than students who were only provided with audio input, but reported fewer comprehension issues and increased levels of enjoyment and motivation, leading to the conclusion "that use of video might lead better vocabulary learning in language classrooms when compared to the use of audio material only" (p. 456).

4.2 Video as a Primary Source of Input

In the following studies, the primacy of video takes a much more noticeable role. In fact, there is no teacher disseminating information to the students, and all language learning is done specifically through the medium of video.

4.2.1 Video Storybooks

This study, run by Verhallen and Bus (2009) in the Netherlands, compares the effectiveness of using video to disseminate a storybook versus a standard static picture format. The determination is reached that video is more effective than standard books at capturing young L2 learners' attention, resulting in net positive language gains.

4.2.2 Children's Television Workshop

Although this 1988 study by Rice and Woodsmall was performed with L1 children, it still indicated a remarkable ability for children (3 and 5 year olds) to acquire language from nothing more than video viewing. If language acquisition is possible for L1, then it is not a large step to assume that the same possibility holds true for L2 as long as the surrounding input is comprehensible and provides suitable context.

5. DISCUSSION

There are numerous studies and theoretical examples that extoll the benefits of using video in a language-learning classroom; although a recurring theme appearing in most of these studies is that video is best utilized as an auxiliary aid in the language classroom, and cannot be used as a pedagogical method that replaces the teacher. However there is not a suitable explanation provided in the literature as to why this is true, and it runs counter to the professions of EFL learners who claim they have successfully acquired a language solely by watching videos. Krahsen's Input Hypothesis (1985) and the studies run by Bal-Gezegin (2014), Verhallen and Bus (2009) and Rice and Woodsmall (1988) attest that at the very least there are a minimal amount of gains that can be attained by language learners without the presence of a teacher.

Of course there are certain output related issues that video is incapable of addressing, as well as other roles that a teacher traditionally fills. It cannot answer learner's questions or pinpoint specific weak spots and customize a lesson plan accordingly. However given the evidence, it is possible that there is some validity to the hypothesis that video possesses the ability to serve as an effective conveyor of language input at levels significant enough

to render the position of teacher unnecessary.

6. CONCLUSION

Although anecdotal evidence has existed for quite some time regarding video's effectiveness at promoting language acquisition when used as a primary source of input, there has been a dearth of empirical evidence supporting this belief. However, it is clear that there are situations where certain amounts of language acquisition for children is attainable, prompting the question: just how far can video take a learner without the aid of a teacher? Answering that question conclusively requires further verifiable, quantitative research at hitherto unexplored control levels.

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