

The In-class Movie Theatre: How to Use Streaming Video in the L2 Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes ways in which streaming video may be used as an effective learning tool. After outlining the utility of streaming video as a technology for L2 language learning, this paper provides two separate techniques through which streaming video might be employed in the classroom. The first way is a general viewing strategy through which students may familiarise themselves with new vocabulary and build confidence in foreign language media while the second method involves using the search function inherent to streaming video to find topical clips to help teach specific vocabulary or grammar points.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FILM USE AND ITS BENEFITS TO L2 LEARNERS

Film has been used sporadically within the language learning classroom since the VHS era if not before (Lonerger, 1984). The development of new filmic technologies in recent decades including DVD in the 1990's and Internet based streaming video in the first decade of the new millennium have, however, greatly increased the practicality of showing films in class (King, 2002; Thaler, 2013) and are conducive to the regular usage of film material within English learning curriculums (Magasic, in press). The benefit of films for English learning has been theorised to relate to the way in which the medium provides a rich, multimodal environment of both audio and visual information. The specific affordances of film as a tool for language learning have been variously identified with scholarly literature as the display of contextualized language (King, 2002; Hwang & Huang, 2011; Ismaili, 2013; Bal-Gezegina, 2014); exposure to verbal and paralexical language features (Lonerger, 1984; Whatley, 2012; Thaler, 2013) transmission of cultural norms (Koike, et al. 2001; Brown, 2010; Ittzes Abrams, 2014) and finally, that film is an engaging medium (Flick, 2011; Tuncay, 2014).

STREAMING VIDEO: SHORT CLIPS, SEARCHABLE CATALOGUE,

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SHAREABLE CONTENT

As an online media source, streaming video allows particular affordances which are not available from physical media formats. The author has identified three salient benefits of streaming video which differentiate it from analogue film technologies.

Short Clips

Whereas analogue technologies were time-consuming to use (Massi & Marino, 1996), streaming video requires less equipment and less set-up time meaning that shorter clips may be screened in class. Short clips are desirable as they are less taxing on students' cognitive resources and can be easily integrated into the flow of a lesson to support and enliven its content (King, 2002; Whatley, 2012).

Searchable Catalogue

Online media repositories allow extensive search functionality via the use of keyword tagging and smart algorithms for data retrieval. The *Movieclips* <<http://www.movieclips.com>> database, for example, has extensively catalogued its content allowing the user to search by common details like genre, but also by more innovative categories such as the dialogue contained within a clip. This gives the teacher the ability to find clips which are well-matched to lesson content and even to search for specific examples of different words or phrases in use.

Shareable Content

Online movies can be easily distributed using the share-friendly features of social networks and data hosting sites. This means that rather than having to rely on a single copy of the film material (as was the case in the analogue era), the teacher and students no longer have to watch a film at the same time or in the same place. This opens up many new opportunities for the use of movies in class such as the option for students to watch at their own pace, pausing and replaying as necessary, as well as the ability for students to watch materials outside of class time for previewing or homework.

WAYS TO USE STREAMING VIDEO

1) Light watching for English confidence, general vocab building and test practice

In this mode, a short segment of film is shown to the class accompanied by a

worksheet with multiple choice and/or short answer questions. The questions focus on exploring the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary and facilitating comprehension of the clip. The students are given time to read through the questions and underline key words while the teacher cues up the film. After which the students watch the clip and answer the questions as the action unfolds. This mode of watching can be used as a warm-up or gear-changing exercise as the attention required of the student is relatively light. The aims of this mode of watching are primarily geared toward providing exposure to English language content and attempting to develop confidence and interest in this material. Accordingly, featured clips can also be placed on an online learning space so that students may preview or review content outside of class time. This method also encourages vocabulary building and the practice of test strategies such as answering while listening and keyword recognition.

2) Targeted activities

The second method of watching involves using the search function of online video databases in order to find clips to help elucidate specific vocabulary or language concepts which are being taught in class. Given that films introduce a variety of dynamic ideas in a realistic and interesting way they can provide a very useful aid to flesh out the teachers' explanation of a particular topic. This point is supported by Lonergan (1984, p.53) who notes, "The communicative aspects of a video presentation can often make clear to a learner a point of language which is difficult to explain in words alone." An example of this method is the use of video clips to explain the difference between the terms 'grow' and 'develop' in which the display of moving images helps to clarify the respective meanings which might otherwise be difficult to explain across a language barrier.

DISCUSSION

This paper uses the metaphor of 'classroom as movie theatre' to draw attention to the palpable change in classroom environment that watching a film entails. This change of environment, created through the drawing of curtains, dimming of lights, and setting up of a projector screen, can be used as a way to relax and reenergise students. Movies allow students to take a break from textbook-based work and to engage in an activity which they enjoy. The motivational benefits involved in watching movies are worth attention. From personal experience, students pay attention to film material, eagerly following and interpreting the action. In order to enjoy the full benefits of watching a movie the teacher should keep the students' needs in mind (Flick, 2011). This includes the choice of film material: is the content age-appropriate? Is the language intelligible? Do students have a rough idea of the story and characters? Is there an option of sub-titles in order to facilitate comprehension? Additionally, the conditions of the classroom should also be considered: is there enough light for students to complete worksheets while viewing? Is there adequate airflow? Is the video properly buffered and playing at a sufficient resolution for students to enjoy the story? These factors should all be considered in order to optimise class participation

and the outcomes of watching.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated the theory behind watching streaming video and ways in which it might be used in class. Of course, these are just two methods, options for how to use film in class are as open as the teacher's creativity. Streaming video has provided film with greater utility in the classroom and will continue to do so as online databases develop. However, it is also important that films are implemented in such a way that they resonate with students' needs in order to maximize their benefit as learning tools.

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