Audiovisual Mass Media Technology and Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract

More recent technological advances have made it possible for teachers to access authentic audiovisual resources directly from the Internet and television. In the same line, the purpose of this paper is to consider the advantages and disadvantages of audiovisual technology for second language acquisition. The application of various audiovisual technologies such as computers and television has become a new trend recently in global second language acquisition instruction. Research findings have proven that the use of audiovisual technology has a positive effect on the attainment of various language skills. Nevertheless, the use of various audiovisual technologies in second language acquisition has its own limitations and weaknesses which should also be considered. By recognizing both the advantages and disadvantages, the maximum effectiveness of technology to enhance second language learning can be achieved.

Key words: Second language acquisition, Audiovisual technology, Advantages, Disadvantages

Introduction

Various audiovisual technologies such as computers and television have long been used in developing SLA (Second Language Acquisition) through providing the necessary language input. More recent technological advances have made it possible for teachers to access authentic audiovisual resources directly from the Internet and television. In fact, the impressive developments in audio, video, and computer-mediated communications programs offer many possibilities for SLA through watching related videos, and holding conversations in real-time (Chinnery, 2005; Salaberry, 2001; Bell, 2003; Ishihara & Chi, 2004; Bedjou, 2006).

The application of audiovisual technology in SLA can be traced back to 1970s with the emergence of audiolingualism. It generally included mandatory use of audio laboratories, where students were required to perform the repetition drills for habit formation. However, the audiolingual method fell into disrepute by the end of 1970s.

Computers and Television in Aid of SLA

Following language laboratories, computers and television became the two audiovisual technologies which allow everyone to have easy access to authentic language input for the enhancement of various language skills (Brinton & Gaskill, 1978; Poon, 1992; Berber, 1997; Bell, 2003; among the others).

Audiovisual technologies have been favored a lot in SLA because they support a cognitive approach to language learning which allows learners maximum opportunity to interact within rich contexts through which they construct and acquire second language competence in the language. For example, computers can provide facilitative functions for both teachers and students through keeping with students' language needs, interests, and current curricula. Teachers can quickly and easily provide the necessary language input through various audiovisual programs which trigger communication.

The application of various audiovisual technologies such as computers and television technology has become a new trend recently in global SLA instruction. Research findings have proven that the use of audiovisual technology has a positive effect on the attainment of various language skills. Nonetheless, the employment of various audiovisual technologies in SLA has its own limitations and weaknesses which should also be considered. By recognizing both the advantages and disadvantages of the application of various audiovisual technologies, the maximum effectiveness of technology to enhance SLA can be achieved.

In a nutshell, the main purpose of this paper is to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the integration of various audiovisual mass media technologies for SLA development.

Audiovisual technology and SLA

Computers have been used systematically in the teaching and learning of foreign languages since the 1960s. In fact, the early employment of computers in language learning both

in informal and formal language environments constituted an expansion and growth of the work done in the audiovisual language labs. The tutorial efficiency of computer assisted language learning in formal and informal settings also began in direct proportion to the improvement of the capacities of computers. In the same line, many studies have focused on the incorporation of computers as desktop technology that offer authentic language input for SLA in formal as well as in informal language learning settings in ESL/EFL contexts.

Computers as a kind of technology can proffer access to authentic language input resources that can be used to engage language learners in language learning process, in both formal as well as informal settings. This can vary from listening to/watching various programs, reading different texts, repeating exercises, sending emails, participating in different chat rooms, communicating in the language via the web, and filling in blanks but not in producing oral language (Clifford, 1998; Phillips, 1998).

Non-Desktop Mass Media Technologies

The use of non-desktop technologies such as audiovisual mass media devices, for example, television, has also been attracting rising interest among researchers in SLA (Milton, 2002; Evans, 2006; Mackenzie, 1997; Pemberton et al., 2004; Poon, 1992).

According to Milton (2002), mass media technologies can grant the teachers as well as the learners a wide range of activities and experiences that can sustain language learning in informal settings as well as the formal settings. Regarding the sort of activities to be used in informal settings, Milton underscored the point that numerous activities which lead to language learning in informal setting are embedded in people's day-to-day lives through interaction with other native speakers in target language country or ESL context. Besides, various activities which are based on digital media in the target language, such as watching different programs on TV, playing different computer games in the target language or searching for authentic material on the Internet can also lead to language learning. This can take place although the focus is not on learning. In other words, language learners learn the language without directly getting involved in any sort of language learning activities.

Learning Potential of Interactive TV

Another study concerning the use of non-desktop technology as a source of authentic language input in informal language learning was conducted by Pemberton et al. (2004). The study was on learning the language through interactive television. The foremost rationale of the study was to focus on the learning potential of interactive television in informal settings. According to Pemberton et al., (2004), interactive television allows some level of user interactivity, providing new facilities for information retrieval and communication. In order to support the great potentiality of iTV for language learning in informal settings, Pemberton et al., (2004) based their claim on a sound pedagogical framework that was derived from learners' interests, motivations, and learning styles. Furthermore, the study considered the possibility of

using iTV in informal settings based on different language learning theories such as constructionist and constructivist.

A similar study which focused on using TV news to improve listening proficiency was also conducted by Poon (1992). The study investigated the effectiveness of listening to news on listening comprehension in English as a second language (ESL), as compared with the effectiveness of non-news listening materials. The participants of the study were 66 language learners aged 18-22 in diverse disciplines, 34 in the experimental group and 32 in the control group. The experimental group was taught using the recordings from news materials during the study. In contrast, the control group was taught using several non-news listening materials including commercial listening comprehension materials. The research design was pre-post test using two standardized listening proficiency tests. The results of the study indicated that the experimental group participants made more progress in their listening than the control group. In other words, listening to TV news materials seems to be more beneficial than listening to non-news materials.

Pedagogical Value of TV News

In addition to the above mentioned studies, Baker (1996) also focused on the pedagogical value of TV news in EFL classes and listening comprehension. According to Baker, TV news can help EFL students improve their listening comprehension. Baker made some suggestions for incorporating TV news programs into language learning at all levels. The study concluded that, language learners at various proficiency levels approach TV news in the target language with differing objectives; for example, beginning learners concentrate on listening skills and vocabulary building, whereas advanced learners focus on content and accuracy. As a result, some suggestions for the effective exploitation of news broadcasts are given for four levels of student development.

In short, the majority of the aforementioned descriptive and experimental works have been conducted on the pedagogical value and the effect of exposure to TV and radio news genre on promoting different language skills especially listening comprehension but none of them has specifically focused on the relationship between exposure to mass media news genre and EFL learners' speaking proficiency

The advantages of Technology in Second Language Acquisition

The current increasing application of various technologies such as computers in second language acquisition confirms the pedagogical value of this technology for SLA. Computers along with its attached language learning programs could provide second language learners more independence from classrooms and allowing learners the option to work on their learning material at any time anywhere. Once various audiovisual technologies are used in conjunction with traditional second language classroom study, students can study more independently,

leaving the teacher more time to concentrate effort on those parts of second language teaching that are still hard or impossible by the technology such as essay writing and presentation.

Following is a list of some advantages attached to the application of various audio-visual technologies in second language learning:

- Prove practices for students through the experiential learning
- Offer students more the learning motivation
- Enhance student achievement
- Increase authentic materials for study
- Encourage greater interaction between teachers and students and students and peers
- Emphasize the individual needs
- Regard independence from a single source of information
- Enlarge global understanding
- Provide a lot of fun games and communicative activities
- Reduce the learning stresses and anxieties
- Help second language learners strengthen their linguistic skills through various communicative and interactive activities

Authentic Cultural Information, etc.

Several other articles have discussed the potential impact of using videos in foreign language study. Herron, Cole, and Corrie (2000), for example, offer support that showing videos in the classroom allows instructors to expose language learners to authentic cultural information. Moreover, research suggests that internet-based audiovisual materials can be effective language learning tools. Hanson-Smith (2004) describes the pedagogical benefits of using online videos as in-class learning resources. In addition, she underlines the fact that the Internet is increasing access to professional audiovisual resources that are free, authentic, and suitable for language learning development.

Finally, many scholars have noted the benefits of implementing a video production component in language classes. For example, at the college level, Katchen, Morris, and Savova (2005) have explored the possibility of using video production to engage language learners, asking students to produce vocabulary-focused videos. They argue that their approach facilitates the creation of learning resources for future students. There is also research that supports the utilization of video for younger foreign language students. For example, Sharp (2005) describes a class video project suitable for middle school students. Based on his research, Sharp advises starting out with simple, group-based projects when implementing video production in the middle school classroom. This advice can easily be extrapolated to the college-level classroom.

The Disadvantages of Audiovisual Mass Media in Second Language Acquisition

Although there are many advantages associated with the application of various audiovisual technologies such as computers and televisions, they still have some limitations and disadvantages. For example, in relation to the use of computers, it is necessary that both teachers and learners have basic technology knowledge before they apply computer technology to assist SLA. No teacher/student can utilize computer if s/he lacks training in the uses of computer technology. Unfortunately, most teachers today do not have sufficient technological training to guide their students exploring computer and its assisted language learning programs. Therefore, the benefits of computer technology for those teachers/students who are not familiar with computer are inexistent.

Moreover, the software of some computer-assisted language learning programs is still imperfect. Current computer technology mainly deals with reading, listening, and writing skills. Even though some speaking programs have been developed recently, their functions are still limited. More importantly, Computers cannot handle unexpected situations. Second language learners' learning situations are various and ever changing. Due to the limitations of computer's artificial intelligence, computer technology is unable to deal with learners' unexpected learning problems and response to learners' question immediately as teachers do. The reasons for the computer' inability to interact effectively can be traced back to a fundamental difference in the way humans and computers utilize information.

Conclusion

The recent developments in audiovisual mass media technologies have made access to authentic language data (input) easy for language learners/teachers. The initial aim of the present paper was set to consider the benefits and the drawbacks of the utilization of various audiovisual mass media technologies into language learning. Audiovisual mass media technologies are pedagogically valuable source of language input mainly because they;

- Provide the language learners with authentic materials
- Motivate the language learners
- Facilitate interaction which help the development of communicative activities
- Provide opportunities for experiential learning.

The few drawbacks associated to the use of audio-visual mass media technologies were also concluded to be in relation to the basic knowledge of how to work with some technologies such as computer. Lack of insufficient knowledge about the way, for example, computers should be utilized may stop some language learners/teacher to use them. However, it was concluded that the benefits of audio-visual mass media technologies overweight the drawbacks.

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