

Multimedia: Enhancing Speaking in EFL Classrooms

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Resumen: El uso de multimedia en clases de inglés como lengua extranjera se ha convertido en una importante herramienta para promover la comunicación. Aderssen y Kramsch (1999) manifestaron que “usar recursos de multimedia transforma nuestra labor de enseñar un idioma como un sistema formal a enseñarlo como una... ‘práctica comunicativa’” (p. 2). Recursos tecnológicos como los videos, la música, sitios web, computadoras entre otros proporcionan información auténtica que puede ser utilizada para aprender un idioma extranjero. Estos recursos además proveen ejemplos del lenguaje utilizado en situaciones reales. Los profesores de idiomas deben generar espacios para que los aprendientes se beneficien del uso de la tecnología y materiales auténticos. De acuerdo con el Programa de Estudios de Inglés del Ministerio de Educación Pública (2001) “El profesor debería proveer una variedad de oportunidades para los estudiantes, con el propósito de generar los modelos de información necesarios” (p. 22). El uso de videos como base para que los estudiantes produzcan sus propios trabajos digitales es una manera de promover las habilidades lingüísticas, especialmente la del habla. Esta actividad con fines pedagógicos requiere que los estudiantes hagan uso de recursos como videos, guiones, cámaras, computadoras y proyectores. Este estudio propone el uso de elementos de multimedia como una estrategia alternativa para reforzar la habilidad oral de los estudiantes de inglés. Los y las profesores (as) de inglés encuentran en esta investigación una experiencia pedagógica sistematizada que propone el uso y la producción de videos cortos como una técnica para enriquecer el dominio del inglés como lenguaje extranjero.

Palabras clave: expresión oral, tecnología, multimedia, videos, actividades

Abstract: The use of multimedia in classes of English as a foreign language has become a tool to promote communication. Aderssen and Kramsch (1999) stated that “using multimedia transforms our task from teaching language as a formal system to teaching language as ... ‘communicative practice’” (p. 2). Videos, music, web-sites, computers and other technological resources provide authentic input to learn a foreign language. Furthermore, these materials are sources of natural occurring language. Language teachers should generate settings in which students benefit from technology and authentic materials. According to the Costa Rican National English Syllabus (2001), “The teacher should provide a variety of opportunities for the students in order to bring about the necessary models or language input” (p. 22). The use of videos as input for students to produce their own short-videos is a way to enhance the linguistic skills, specially speaking. This activity demands the language learners to use devices such as videos, scripts, cameras, computers and projector. This paper recommends the use of multimedia as an alternative strategy to reinforce students’ speaking skill. Teachers of English find in this research a systematized teaching experience that proposes the use and production of short videos as a technique to enrich students’ language proficiency.

Key words: speaking, technology, multimedia, videos, teaching activities

1. Introduction

The new technological era has brought both benefits and challenges for language teachers. Learners are now more familiar with technological devices, and they demand that their teachers make use of technology in classes. Classes developed by using books, whiteboards or poster-boards are not interesting anymore for students who are used to using the latest devices in the market. Traditional teaching resources make students lose their attention spam more quickly and wander around, so teachers must look for different methodologies and strategies to draw their attention. The task of using technology in classes becomes a matter of interest; especially for language teachers who can find in multimedia-based activities support to develop their students communicate competence.

The teaching of second and foreign languages has varied significantly in the last years. This variation is closely linked to the new trends in technology. Both learners and teachers live immersed in technological environments where devices such as phones, computers, cameras, television, and others are commonly used. Due to the fact that media play a key role in the outside world, most language learners expect to find mechanical paraphernalia in the classrooms. Certainly, multimedia-based lessons are more attractive and motivating. Brinton (as cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001) supported this claim as follows “media help us [teachers] to motivate students by bringing a slice or real life into the classroom and by presenting language in its more complete communicative context” (p. 461). In other words, media materials provide learners with contextualized situations in which language is used naturally. Multimedia-based activities help pupils to link language instruction and the outside world.

1.1. Objectives

- To research the role of multimedia in language teaching.
- To design multimedia-based activities that reinforce EFL learners' speaking.

1.2. Research questions

- What is the role of multimedia in language teaching?
- What kinds of multimedia-based activities reinforce EFL learners' speaking?

2. Literature Review

2.1.1. Linguistic Skills

The development of students' four basic linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) must be the main concern of teachers when planning classroom activities. Learning a foreign language does not only mean to understand it but also being able to establish and keep up with communicative situations. Learners must be exposed to the language so that they become confident when using it. Learners of foreign or second languages must be provided with comprehensible input in order to help them reach linguistic competence. Input, as Gass and Selinker (2001) defined, is the language to which learners are exposed (p.259). This comprehensible input should address the four main language skills. According to Tiwari (2008), speaking and writing are grouped as active skills whereas listening and reading are grouped as passive skills (p. 26). In other words, when a learner is listening or reading, s/he is carrying out a passive action because this person is just receiving knowledge or information. On the other hand, active skills are those through which the learner produces or puts into practice the knowledge acquired by means of the passive skills. In formal language learning settings, auditory input is most of the times offered by the instructors. However, later in the journey, many other sources can be used to reinforce listening. Even though some theorists appeal to speaking as the second skill to be developed in the learning process, before starting to produce utterances in the target language, learners need sufficient and quality input (Krashen, 1986, p 43). Once learners are able to comprehend and internalize the input provided, they are ready to start producing output. In the beginning, such production may not be accurate at all, but with time, practice and interaction, students start producing native like structures. Such production or output, as Gass and Selinker (2001) called it, can be achieved by speaking or writing (p. 26). Speaking usually comes first, and it might be because speaking is commonly the ultimate goal students have when learning a target language. Being able to speak is also a source of motivation for students to continue with the learning process.

2.2. The Use of Multimedia in Language Teaching

Media-based language lessons are currently the tendency when teaching a language. Most teachers rely on the use of media to develop dynamic classes. Educators trust these resources to bring the outside world – the target language – into their language classrooms. It is important to remark that media involve a large number of audiovisual aids. Brinton (as cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001) defined media as:

The most immediate connotation of the term ‘media,’ at least as related to language teaching, is that of the ‘large M media’ – of technological innovation in language teaching, of mechanical paraphernalia, and of glossy, polished audiovisual aids – with all the media anxiety that these can conjure up in teachers. (p. 460)

Brinton also divided these resources in nontechnical and technical media. The former is more frequently used in environments where technology is not available. Nontechnical media include the use of boards, flashcards, posters, maps, photos, newspaper and others. The latter depends on technology; their main constituents are software and hardware. Some items that belong to technical media are television, projectors, video player, computers and language lab. (p. 462) Not all these visual aids represent a novelty in the language teaching; however, their use assure pupils an opportunity to improve their language proficiency. Finally, multi-media based lessons facilitate the task of language learning to almost all types of learners.

2.3. Video-based activities in the EFL classrooms

The increasing availability of technology has facilitated the learning/ teaching process. In the area of languages, technology allows learners to have contact with natural occurring language. It makes the learning process more natural and realistic. For example, television exposes pupils to patterns of pronunciation, vocabulary, gestures and facial expression. Movies and videos are used in language classroom as means to expose learners with the target language patterns. Nolasco and Arthur (2003) stated that video-based activities help students “... to imitate the production of certain words and phrases, and the body language that accompanies them” (p. 60). After watching a video, instructors can ask students to imitate the way the utterances are said and, the body language used by the characters. These types of activities help students use extra-linguistic clues to understand and interpret what is being said. An advantage of using videos is that most of them contain a number of distinctive voices and accents. Additionally, language learners can get familiar with different cues in the speakers’ voices, for instance, authority, hesitation, cooperation, level of education as well as their place of residence. Likewise, learners benefit from the target cultural aspects that most videos encompass. All these features enrich learners’ verbal and non-verbal strategic competence and prepare them to face conversations in real contexts.

3. Data analysis

This section contains the analysis of the data gathered during this research. A questionnaire was administered to EFL teachers to garner their insights about the use of multimedia as aids to help students develop their linguistic skills.

■Table 3.1. Linguistic skills that EFL teachers emphasize the most in the language classes.

Linguistic skills	% of EFL teachers' answers
Speaking	67%
Listening	11%
Reading	11%
Writing	11%

Note: The information in this table was taken from the Instrument 1: Questionnaire for EFL Teachers, which was administered in November, 2012.

Table 3.1 depicts the emphasis teachers give to the language skills when developing their classes. Speaking is the skill to which tutors pay more attention when teaching English. Language instructors' perception regarding the importance of developing speaking in classes is consistent with what theorists have pointed out about the necessity of achieving speaking competence as the main goal of the learning process. Being speaking the most emphasized skill means that teachers devote time to plan and design conversational tasks. Actually, some teachers are accustomed to using technology; thus, they might resort to media-based activities to help students reach communicative competence.

■Table 3.2. Activities implemented to reinforce speaking.

Teaching Activities	% of EFL teachers' answers
Watching Videos	89%
Brainstorming	77%
Listening to songs	77%

■Table 3.2. (continued)

Teaching Activities	% of EFL teachers' answers
Round tables	77%
Debates	66%
Note taking	33%

Note: The information in this table was taken from the Instrument 1: Questionnaire for EFL Teachers, which was administered in November, 2012.

Table 3.2 shows information about the teaching activities used by EFL teachers when reinforcing speaking in their classes. 89% of the teachers rely on video-based activities to help their students develop oral skills. Teachers consider that videos provide students with authentic language. Video-based activities are also helpful when dealing with visual and auditory learners. The use of videos reinforces what students hear with images. Also, learners have the chance to focus on non-verbal communication which most of the times is a cultural matter. Teachers also agreed with the fact that songs are key aids to make students participate orally in classes. Finally, using videos and songs to develop speaking skills has become very popular amongst teachers.

■ Table 3.3. Multimedia devices used in EFL classrooms and their availability in the institution.

Multimedia Devices	% of use of the devices	% of Availability in the institution
Projector	77%	77%
Cameras	11%	22%
Computers	100%	66%
Songs	100%	33%
Videos	100%	22%

Note: The information in this table was taken from the Instrument 1: Questionnaire for EFL Teachers, which was administered in November, 2012.

Table 3.3 illustrates the most available multimedia devices at educational institutions. Among them, projectors and computers are the most common devices in EFL classrooms. Informants stated that these types of media are useful when developing the different stages of the lesson (warm up, presentation, practice, and consolidation). It is important to remark that even though videos and songs are the least available multimedia resources, teachers agreed with the fact that such means are the most used devices in the classroom. There are different reasons to carry out activities in which song and videos are the bases; for instance, these visual-aids are appealing and keep learners updated with new trends in music and famous artists. Also, the information displayed in table 3.3. indicates that teachers make use of mechanical paraphernalia to develop their classes. In other words, teachers are creative and innovative when developing their classes. For this reason, it is imperative to provide them with extra resources to ease their work.

Almost all informants of this investigation recommended the use of media to develop language classes. Instructors claimed that media-based activities catch the students' attention. In addition, informants agreed with the fact that video-based activities expose learners to comprehensible input. 44% of the teachers said that they resort to the use of videos because these resources contain natural, spontaneous language.

The analysis carried out to the data garnered from EFL teachers help to recognize the extent to which professors reinforce the students' speaking skill through the use of media. The information gathered shows that teachers face limitations regarding the availability of media in their institutions; however, information stated on Table 3.3 also indicates that teachers make an effort to bring those devices into the classrooms. Finally, the key role of multimedia in current language classes is supported by teachers' answers in questionnaire # 1 (appendix 2). Those positive perceptions about the implementation of multimedia-based classes encouraged the researchers of this proposal to systematize a teaching experience in which language learners are required to use videos, computer, projector and cameras.

4. The Use of Multimedia to Reinforce Speaking in EFL Classrooms

Media take an almost infinite variety of forms, and both language teachers and learners should resort to these audio and visual aids. Multimedia-based activities involve students more naturally in the learning process. However, language educators have to be creative to incorporate media in their lesson plans. Instructors must plan carefully which media fulfill their learners' linguistic needs. By using media, learners will experience the target language in a more authentic and meaningful way. Consequently, the researches of this paper propose video-based activities as a way to expose learners with language in its more complete communicative context. Furthermore, these kinds of activities enhance students' speaking skill. In sum, this is a systematized teaching experience that proposes the use and production of short videos enrich students' language proficiency. The proposal in appendix No. 1 follows the next format:

- Activity 1. Work Bank

In this section, students are provided with some vocabulary from the video. The teacher encourages them to brainstorm the meanings of the words according to different contexts. After the students' brainstorming, the teacher supplies the meaning of the words.

- Activity 2. Taking Notes

In this activity, students watch the video. They are asked to identify and associate the vocabulary studied with the images on the video. Students focus on the characters' extra-linguistic cues such as facial expression, use of gestures, and style of clothing. Then, learners watch the video a second time and take notes about the sequence of events presented on the video.

- Activity 3. Speaking

In this section, students put into practice the speaking skill. They have to retell the story and discuss about the situations shown on the video. They also comment on the characters' extra-linguistic cues such as facial expression, use of gestures, and style of clothing.

- Activity 4. Video Making

This task can be carried out as a class activity or as an extra-class assignment. It is important to remark that pupils need time to develop it. To perform this task, the students get in groups of four or five. Then, they choose a song of their interest. The next step consists in planning a sequence of events to represent the situations stated by the lyrics of the song. Next, they act out the events and film a video. Students are allowed to use the original video of the song as a guide or to make up their own version. Students have to include captions explaining what is going on in the story.

- Activity 5. Sharing experiences

In the last part of this video-based task, the students show the video to the classmates. They also have to prepare an oral presentation to talk about the main video issues. They follow some questions to prepare their speech.

5. Conclusions

Considering the wide variety of multimedia resources and the potential effectiveness of using them in EFL classrooms, teachers should boost the use of innovative techniques. Traditional methodologies need to be changed in order to provide learners with meaningful learning experiences. In addition, multimedia are not resources for teachers only; students can also be encouraged to use media as aids to support their learning process. The use of multimedia might help learners develop autonomy and generate self-confidence. However, multimedia should not be used randomly. It is recommended to establish a plan and state clear teaching objectives. Multimedia-based activities might prevent both, teacher and students, from losing the focus on the learning/teaching process. Even though educational institutions have a limited number of technological resources, teachers show interest in providing learners with authentic material by using multimedia. Thus, it is necessary to encourage teachers to keep on using media and request help from education authorities in Costa Rica. Having technology does not mean that students are going to learn a foreign language, but at least, the process can be eased.

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Appendix 1: Video-based Activities

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VIDEO: MISUNDERSTOOD by Bon Jovi

1. ACTIVITY WORD BANK



- **Whole-class activity:** Read out loud and discuss the following vocabulary.
- **You can share the meaning of the vocabulary with your classmates and exchange information.**

WORD BANK	MEANING
slip	
hit	
find	
pick-pocket	
wander	
steal	
amnesia	
chase	
dump	
float	
land	
ashore	
mistake	
earthquake	
fall	



Designed by Jimenez/Palacios/Acuña

2. ACTIVITY TAKING NOTES 

- **Individually:** Watch the video "Misunderstood" by Bon Jovi and try to associate the vocabulary studied with the images on the video.
- Watch the video again and take notes about the sequence of events presented on the video (e.g. Jack was buying his girlfriend some flowers when he slipped and hit his head.)



A large, rounded rectangular area with a dashed border, containing four horizontal lines for writing notes. A small cartoon pencil character is positioned in the bottom right corner of this area.

3. ACTIVITY SPEAKING

- **Whole-class activity:** Focus your attention and comment on extra-linguistic clues such as characters' facial expression, use of gestures, and style of clothing. Then, retell the story and discuss if the situations shown on the video are possible. For example: Jack was attacked by some dogs, and they ripped his clothes off. Use expressions such as: I don't think that is possible because...



Designed by Jiménez/Palacios/Acuña



4. ACTIVITY VIDEO MAKING

- **Whole-class activity:** Make groups of four or five. Choose a song of your interest. Then, plan a sequence of events to represent the situations stated by the lyrics of the song.
- Act out the events and film a video.
- Include captions to explain what is going on in the story.
- You can use the original video of the song as a guide or you can make up your own version.

**5. ACTIVITY SHARING EXPERIENCES**

- Show the video to the class.
- 
- Prepare an oral presentation to refer to the planning and development of the video. Use the next questions as a guide for your speech. Why did you choose this song? Which were the most entertaining aspects of producing the video? Which were the main difficulties faced during the production of the video? Why did you choose to represent the message of the song with that sequence of events?



8. Write a check (✓) if you use these types of multimedia in your English classes. If the answer is yes, mark in which stage of the lesson and frequency you use them, and write your perception about students' reaction towards their use.

			FREQUENCY	STUDENT'S REACTION	Availability in the institution
Projector	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Warm-up	<input type="checkbox"/> Every class		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Practice <input type="checkbox"/> Consolidation	<input type="checkbox"/> Every other class <input type="checkbox"/> Twice a month		<input type="checkbox"/> No
Cameras	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Warm-up	<input type="checkbox"/> Every class		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Practice <input type="checkbox"/> Consolidation	<input type="checkbox"/> Every other class <input type="checkbox"/> Twice a month		<input type="checkbox"/> No
Computers	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Warm-up	<input type="checkbox"/> Every class		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Practice <input type="checkbox"/> Consolidation	<input type="checkbox"/> Every other class <input type="checkbox"/> Twice a month		<input type="checkbox"/> No
CD player	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Warm-up	<input type="checkbox"/> Every class		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Practice <input type="checkbox"/> Consolidation	<input type="checkbox"/> Every other class <input type="checkbox"/> Twice a month		<input type="checkbox"/> No
Videos	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Warm-up	<input type="checkbox"/> Every class		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Practice <input type="checkbox"/> Consolidation	<input type="checkbox"/> Every other class <input type="checkbox"/> Twice a month		<input type="checkbox"/> No
Songs	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Warm-up	<input type="checkbox"/> Every class		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Practice <input type="checkbox"/> Consolidation	<input type="checkbox"/> Every other class <input type="checkbox"/> Twice a month		<input type="checkbox"/> No

9. Do you consider that the use of these types of multimedia in the language classroom is effective in developing speaking skills? _____

Why? _____