

Chauhan, K.I. (2015) Learning Language Functions through Collaborative Video Creation: A Case in ESL context, *ICT & Innovations in Education' International Electronic Journal*, 3(3), 23-29

ICT & Innovations in Education

International Electronic Journal

ISSN 2321 – 7189 | Volume 3, Issue 3 | July 2015

Learning Language Functions through Collaborative Video Creation: A Case in ESL context

Dr. Kiran I. Chauhan

Assistant Professor in English, Dr. S. & S.S. Gandhy Engineering College, Surat, Gujarat.

www.ictjournal.com

Abstract

Using technology in language classroom has been a matter of interest for language educators, researchers and classroom practitioners for quite some time now. However, there is a requirement to identify case studies and experiments that reports successful results of using technological applications and tools in a low-resource and low-proficiency context. This paper is an attempt to report such project taken up with the First Year students of M.A.ELT where the students were involved in creating scripts and recording video with mobile phones. The result outcomes were determined with aspects like (a) language learning skills, (b) motivation through collaboration, and (c) self-reflection.

Key words: video creation, language function, collaboration

Introduction

The ubiquity of Technology and its use has not only changed the way we live our lives but it has also tempted the language educators to find new possible alternatives to language teaching and learning. Although prominence of using technology effectively has made qualitative difference in developed educational set up, its best practices are yet to be explored in the Indian classroom context. There is a great need to identify feasible alternatives of technological applications and tools that can provide better learning environment to learners in the Indian context and specifically in the context of Gujarat. It is challenging, in a way, to amalgamate the technology with the traditional educational set up. However, this paper is a case to report how technology, in its miniature form through using video-recording, can be incorporated with the established conventional classroom set up.

Literature Review

Using computer and other technologies to facilitate language teaching and learning has been a matter of interest for many researchers and language educators. Especially computer, as Warschauer (1996) states, has become a tool of production and creation in language classroom rather than merely a tool of drill and practice for grammar and discrete point activities. However, using computer or technology creatively in language classroom has become a hot issue among language practitioners and researchers. There have been substantial studies highlighting usefulness of technologies in language learning. One of the fascinating areas within the purview of tech-use is that of using videos or multimedia in language classroom. As Canning-Wilson (2000) reveals (as cited in Cakir, I. 2006) in a large scale survey that the students like learning language through the use of video, which is often used to mean quite different things in language teaching. Similarly, Heimei (1997) also considers videos as a rich and valuable resource for language teaching based on a study. As a matter of fact, video has been considered as a remedy especially in an environment where learners do not access to

target language use or have limited resources to use target language. In that sense, videos are considered handy materials to provide appropriate visual and audio input to learners to acquire new language. Moreover, exposure to authentic use of target language also makes the tasks based on videos purposeful for learners because in reality learners are likely to meet fewer opportunities to use target language in surroundings. Similar ideas are expressed by Katchen (2002) stating videos as crucial asset providing rich authentic language input in language classrooms.

As the usefulness of videos in language classroom is quite evident, as mentioned above, the advantages of involving students in creating videos and multimedia projects are also evinced by many researchers. However, there has been difference the way these studies have used the terminologies like ITPBL (Information technology – assisted project based learning), CMC (computer mediated communication), TELL (technology enabled language learning) and so on. A common thread among all these studies is the shifting onus on students where they are involved and encouraged to participate in the process of creating or producing materials in some form, and that too in target language. Unlike conventional experiments where a technology is introduced in order to measure its impact on a group of students, these project based methodology demands students' participation in generating language. The idea of language production is always implicit, as the students generally remain unaware with the fact that while working on a certain project they are also producing language. For example, a study conducted by Moursund & Smith (2000) reveals that learners learn more and retain their knowledge better if IT-assisted PBL is used in a constructivist and cooperative learning environment. Similarly, a study by Chan (2001) brings out important findings that the quality of language learning is enhanced due to computer enhanced project based learning as students participate more enthusiastically than the conventional mode of learning.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted with the group of 39 learners studying in the first year of the post-graduation programme in M.A. (ELT) at H.M.Patel Institute of English Training and Research. The learners come from diverse linguistic and cultural background. However, majority of them come from vernacular school background where there is minimal exposure to English. Even during their graduation study they are hardly exposed to situations where they could use English functionally. The learners join the M.A. ELT programme with the intention to become proficient ESL teachers. The courses offered in the programme aim to make them aware of the core concepts of ELT and to bring together theory and practice for the learners in a meaningful way suitable to their contexts.

The Project

The learners in M.A. ELT are encouraged to design and tryout instructional materials in ESL context in one of the courses. The learners study the theoretical principles in prior to take up materials production. This project was initiated with the intention to enable the learners understand the production of language teaching materials from the language function point of view which is different from form based instructional material. The prime objective of this month long project was to make the learners identify language functions to be used in real life and practice them in real life. Following are the steps the way project was carried out.

Step 1

The learners were divided into groups depending on their linguistic skills and computer skills through a questionnaire.

Step 2

The learners were asked to identify one situation and language function on which they would like to work. For example visit to a health center, visit to a bank, and visit to a hospital and so on.

Step 3

The learners were asked prepare a situation based dialogue script on the situation that they had decided.

Step 4

Once the script was ready, they were advised to get it checked from atleast one other group and get feedback on the script that they had prepared.

Step 5

The learners were instructed to revise their scripts incorporating the suggestions made by the other group.

Step 6

The learners visited the spot that they had decided and video recorded the conversation performing the script that they had prepared. However, they instructed that the recorded version of the conversation should look natural and not fabricated. The videos were mostly recorded on mobile phones.

Step 7

A special session was arranged where a technical expert demonstrated how a video can be edited through Microsoft video editor programme.

Step 8

The learners edited their videos trying out their skill on video editing.

Step 9

The learners also submitted the video along with the script and their reflective reports in the form of portfolio.

Step 10

The learners' videos were showcased on projector. The whole class watched each other videos and gave feedback on each others' performance.

Project outcome

On the basis of the reflective reports and group feedback sessions learners seem to benefit in the following aspects:

Language Learning Skills

The learners expressed that they think that their language learning skills were improved over a period of project. The language learning skills involves basic language skills (LSRW), editing skills, cognitive skills and active interest in language learning. Although the learners found the project challenging at every stage, they found it encouraging working on their own to meet the challenges. Majority of the students were in favour of the idea to share their scripts and videos with other groups to know whether the material prepared is up to the mark or not.

Motivation through collaboration

The learners in a typical ESL context are mostly unsure when they are asked to produce something in the target language either in spoken or written form. While working on this project learners in groups found it less threatening than producing something individually. As the division of groups was done on the basis of linguistic and computer skills of learners, all groups had some commonness in group. It was revealed in reflective reports that while working in group they were happy to share the duties as well as recommend changes in the work produced. There was a great sense of achievement for all to see themselves on screen during the showcasing session. The whole idea of creating script, designing dialogues, performing role on the actual location and recording it on video was found innovative and interesting by the learners.

Self-reflection

Reflection is important at any stage of learning, which is often neglected while involving learners in assignments. One of the objectives of this project was to provide learners opportunities to see themselves as communicators. Being able to perform in a target language is as crucial as to observe how effective one has performed in a communicative event. Recording and watching videos at last enabled learners to see how good or bad they were while actually communicating in target language. The sense of 'self-reflection' that learners experienced in the process was repeatedly mentioned in the discussion session:

This video recording gave me a chance to find out my mistakes, errors in pronumciation, and helped me in improving my speech in English. It feels good when somebody points out my strengths and weaknesses as a speaker... (student 1)

For the first time I saw myself on screen. I am happy to see the way I speak English. And I realise well now what area I need to improve on... (student 2)

I was not sure whether language functions can be integrated in real life so well like this. This experience has helped me to analyze my performance... (student 3)

In short, viewing video in groups as well as in class gave the learners a lot of confidence and they were able to identify the areas where they need to improve on. Most of them discussed about their body language, postures, gestures and so on which often means a lot in conveying meaning in communication.

Findings

The major findings of the research were the following:

- The learners found improvement in their language learning skills as they were involved in decision making, editing skills, writing skills, and communication skills.
- Writing and performing in a group is found motivational to achieve the goal. Especially in a low resource and low-proficiency pedagogic situations working in a group can produce best results.
- The self-reflection while viewing video enabled the learners to identify their areas of strength and weakness, especially in the use of English.
- The learners were able to relate the theoretical principles of 'function based language teaching' with their real life experiences.

Conclusion

In a low-resources and low-proficiency context it becomes evident to introduce technology intelligently and judiciously. The students' background and contextualization of the given task is very crucial in enabling them to construct language. The strategy of using video-recording can easily be used as a tool to make learners effective users of language at stage.

References

- Chan, E. (2001). Improving student performance by reducing anxiety. *Positive Pedagogy*, 1 (3) from <http://www.mcmaster.ca/cil/posped/pastissues/volume.1no.3/index.htm>
- Cakir, I. (2006). The use of video as an audio-visual material in foreign language teaching classroom. *TOJET*, Vol.5.,issue.4.
- Hemei, J. (1997) *Teaching with Video in an English Class*, Journal of English Teaching Forum, vol.35-2, pp 45-47
- Katchen, J. E. (1996). Using authentic video in English language teaching: Tips for Taiwan's teachers. Taipei:The Crane Publishing Company, Ltd Video in ELT—Theoretical and Pedagogical Foundations. Proceedings of the 2002 KATE (The Korea Association of Teachers of English) International Conference (pp. 256-259).
- Maurson, D. & Smith, I. (2000). Research on technology in education. Retrieved September 20, 2014 from <http://www.iste.org/>
- Warschauer M. (1996). Computer assisted language learning: An introduction. Retrieved January 17, 2011, from <http://www.ict4lt.org/en/warschauer.htm>