

The use of audio and video recordings in English language teaching

Upotreba audio i video zapisa u nastavi Engleskog jezika

Milena Nikolic, Faculty of Philology, Anglistics, Sinergija University

Abstract – By introducing and depicting the assignments set before the third-year-students of the Faculty of Philology at Sinergija University in Bijeljina enrolled in the course of Didactics, we tried to identify the innovative ways of using audio and video recordings inside and outside the classroom and touch upon their numerous positive effects on foreign language teaching and learning. The students' smartphones were used in performing the tasks. Task 1 establishes a link between literary proficiency and the use of online newspapers. Task 2 involves students' moving to a new location, linking learning a foreign language to the students' real world experience and learning about nonverbal communication. Task 3 presents the way in which an inaccessible literary text is likely to become amusing and accessible by means of digital devices.

Keywords – audio recording; video recording; simulations; smartphones; newspaper article; literary text

I INTRODUCTION

The current computer technology has many advantages for second and foreign language teaching (L2 pedagogy) (Jonassen, 1996; Salaberry, 1999). Portable digital devices such as smartphones, notebooks and tablets provide L2 learners with more independence from classrooms and allow the students to work on their learning material anytime and anywhere. When combined with traditional L2 pedagogy, the use of computer technology and Internet outside the classroom could offer the interdisciplinary and multicultural learning opportunities for students, enabling them to carry out a more independent work. Through various communicative and interactive activities inside and outside the classroom, portable digital devices can help second language learners to strengthen their linguistic skills, enhance their learning attitude, build their self-instruction strategies and boost their self-confidence.

Students can get various authentic reading materials by connecting to the Internet. The random access to Web pages would break the linear flow of instruction (Warschauer 2004). In this way, students extend their personal views and acquire their real-life experience. Interactive visual media offer a unique instructional capability for topics that involve problem solving situations, such as interpersonal solving, foreign language or second language learning (Kozma 1991). Experiential theory educators believe that learning is about making sense of information, extracting meaning and relating

information to everyday life and that learning is about understanding the world through reinterpreting knowledge (Ormrod, 1999). Since the way information is presented is not linear, second language learners can still develop thinking skills and choose their own sphere of interest. This paper will present the ways in which theoretical knowledge could be linked with practical experience by the use of audio-visual media (audio and video-recordings) in L2 pedagogy.

II AUDIO RECORDING

Audio recordings have had a major impact on the language teaching and have given students in non-English-speaking countries the opportunity to hear English being used for a range of purposes by a variety of people (Underwood 1987: 83). Everybody is familiar with the traditional way of using audio recordings in teaching foreign language to students (the use of CD from the course book/readers, the use of computers and speakers, the use of projector etc.). The Tasks 1, 2 and 3 assigned to the students enrolled on the third year of the Faculty of Philology at Sinergija University in Bijeljina during the course of Didactics will indicate an innovative method of introducing audio/video recordings in the English class. Namely, the portable devices such as smartphones, notebooks, tablets or laptops that students always bring with them into the classroom could serve as a perfect educational tool for simultaneously employing the four language skills: reading, speaking, listening and writing. The precise description of Task 1, Task 2 and Task 3 is provided below.

Task 1 Making an audio recording

The list of the following websites was given to students:

www.theguardian.com

www.theeconomist.com

www.thenewyorktimes.com

www.washingtonpost.com

The students were supposed to visit the website on their portable devices (free Wi-Fi was provided in the classroom), pick an article from the online British and American online newspapers (*The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*), record themselves via smartphone/notebook/tablet while reading the chosen extracts for approximately 2-4 minutes, listen to their recordings and note down the first impressions. The students were put in pairs. Student A was supposed to read aloud the text, while the other (Student B) had to record it. Afterwards, they had to play the recording and write down the comments regarding the quality of the content they had just heard. Lively discussion with the short feedback from both the teacher and the peer students followed.

The assignment set during the class showed that the students were startled with both the sound of their voice and the mistakes they made in pronunciation. Many of them admitted that they had heard the sound of their own voice in English recorded and played for the first time in their lives. It was also concluded that they had to be very observant in respect to choosing the articles. They agreed that skimming through the variety of texts before opting for the right one was very helpful for a successful task completion. Also, the students remarked that the text should have been read several times and the meaning and pronunciation of the words they were unsure about should have been checked before the actual task of recording.

The similar assignment was set for homework (each student was advised to do the task individually) since the classroom recording served only to demonstrate that skimming thorough the article was not enough to perform the task successfully. The assignment was worth 5% of the students' final course grade. The students were instructed to scan the chosen article (1), describe and summarize it (2), write everything down (3) and read it aloud while recording themselves (4). Searching for the gist of the text and summarizing it by using a newly acquired vocabulary and complex sentence structure was the most significant (and the most demanding) part of their assignment. Simultaneously, they had to pay particular attention to the tone of their voice, the intonation, the stress, the pace of reading and the regular stops between the sentences.

For the purpose of this paper, an excerpt from the article downloaded from the website www.theeconomist.com would serve as an example to demonstrate both the complexity of both the sentence structure and the vocabulary used at this level. The article is entitled "Raining on Amazon":

"MARGRETHE VESTAGER'S assault on technology firms she deems to have improperly massaged down their tax bills continued this week with a tilt at Amazon. The internet retailer faces a bill of €250m (\$293m) for back taxes over what the European Union's competition commissioner considers to have been an illegal sweetheart deal with Luxembourg. [...]"

This week's order could stoke transatlantic tensions. After the Apple ruling last year, American politicians queued up to

echo the sentiments of Tim Cook, the firm's boss, who derided Ms Vestager's action as "total political crap". Many of them saw Brussels' tax probes as being driven by tech-envy, not sound economics. Washington hinted at retaliation, though nothing specific has been suggested. [...]

The commission's critics have a point. The details of the case are complex, and tax experts will disagree about the legality of the arrangements under the spotlight, just as they did with Apple. Few would deny that the frayed patchwork of international corporate-tax rules need reforming; one proposal, espoused by President Emmanuel Macron of France and supported by several other EU countries, would see multinationals taxed on revenues in particular territories instead of on profits. But punishing a firm for a 14-year-old ruling from a national government, happily accepted by both sides at the time, looks harsh. The uncertainty it stokes may also dampen foreign investors' interest¹ in Europe.[...]"

An audio recording set for homework was played by each student during the next class and students were randomly called out to comment on it. They were invited to give a positive feedback and encouraged to tell each other something that might be useful or suitable for improving their recordings. Comments on reading, intonation, pronunciation, the tone of the voice and the sentence stress were made along with the comments on the quality of the summarized text in respect of its content, the use of adequate vocabulary and the sentence structure.

The students showed immense interest in performing this task. Many of them admitted that they had recorded themselves five or six times in order to achieve the satisfying result. Each of them was able to point out the benefits of doing this task bearing in mind a complexity of the procedure: first, they had to scan the text with demanding grammatical structures and word collocations; then, they had to search for the meaning and pronunciation of the words they were unsure about or unfamiliar with; afterwards, they had to summarize the text using the similar vocabulary and sentence structure; then they had to practice reading aloud and try to sound as natural and spontaneous as possible; after the recording, they had to listen to their own voice; finally, they had to share their own audio recording with the teacher and their peers, listen to the comments and take an active part in the discussion that followed.

Due to the fact that the students were free to choose their own article regardless of its category (Sports, Music, Politics,

¹ A great number of underlined words/phrases/collocations/clauses indicates that the journalistic writing has its specific style that students often find very difficult to cope with. In addition to the paragraphs' brevity, news stories have a particular structure (the headline is big and short, intended to grab reader's attention; the first sentence or paragraph lays down the story; there is a frequent use of quotations; it displays a large number of contrasting opinions with the variety of formal words and collocations). (<https://www.economist.com/news/business-and-finance/21729965-luxembourg-comfort-letter->)

Economics, Culture, etc.) each audio recording was distinctive and unique. The students were given the first push to start reading something related to their own interests. A reading fluency was enhanced and a comprehension of specific information was demonstrated. The recording's authenticity was marked by a distinguished narrative style of its reader. They realized that they could easily identify the various language registers. They started to get accustomed to the recorded sound of their peers' voices and, more importantly, to their own voice. Eventually, a newspaper assignment helped them to develop and improve their professional literacy and made them become more comfortable and spontaneous with the use of foreign language for professional purposes. The assignment promoted research and communication skills. It also assessed the students' abilities to summarize and paraphrase; finally, the students practiced giving a small presentation in the form of an audio recording.

One of the negative sides of this task was the quality of the sound their mobile phones/notebooks/tablets produced. The older version of the smartphone the worse quality of the sound it made. Also, the students who were shy and reserved did not feel quite comfortable with this task. These students were encouraged to occasionally record themselves while reading/speaking English since this method would surely boost their self-confidence and reduce the fear of public speaking.

III VIDEO RECORDING – SIMULATIONS

Activities that include recordings focus on the communicative use of language during the preparation of the material and the organization of the recording. Making audio and video recordings in class can add to motivation, but can we imagine how motivated and excited and eager to participate the students will be if they are told to move to a new location in order to record themselves in a real world? Role play and simulations must be the most motivational, useful, helpful and enjoyable activities in language learning and acquisition, particularly if recorded outside the classroom.

Klippel defines role play and simulations as “forms of games mirroring a slice of reality” (1984: 121). Role play often consists of short scenes that can be both realistic and imaginary (see Heyworth 1978, Lynch 1977, Menné 1975, Seely 1978, Walker 1979). In role plays students have to use the foreign language correctly and adequately. Even though speaking consciously in a particular style and register necessary for the role may be very difficult, these activities do improve the students' oral performance generally.

With role plays the teachers intend to bring the outside world into the classroom. Recording the role play activities outside the classroom is even more enjoyable since the students do not have to be ashamed of their actions – they are aware of the fact that they enter new roles and pretend to be someone else – and they subconsciously know that their acting

is supported by the ‘real background’. Namely, by moving to a new location depending on the role the students decide to take, their acting becomes more convincing and they are more likely to succeed in performing the assignment.

Simulations are more demanding than role plays. They consist of several stages and train all four language skills. With simulations, the teacher's primary goal is to ‘bring’ the classroom into the outside world. By doing so, English language becomes the part of students' real life. The students are encouraged to be more confident and comfortable in the informal conversation, which will eventually serve as a solid basis for introducing them to the complex language structures. This is why simulation as a challenging communicative activity should be regularly included into our teaching. Simulations are “highly structured” and have “more diverse elements” in their content (Klippel, 1984: 121). Davison and Gordon define them as “simplified patterns of human interactions or social processes where the players participate in roles” (Davison and Gordon, 1978: 55). Students do not need to pretend to be somebody else (i.e. a hairdresser), but act as themselves in specific situations (i.e. students chatting/gossiping in a coffee shop). Task 2 shows how making a video recording outside the classroom while students act themselves in specific situations promotes their communication skills and releases the tension present whenever it is expected from them to speak foreign language.

Task 2 Making video recordings

The same target group – the third-year-students enrolled in the course of Didactics – was used in performing Task 2. The assignment was worth 10% of the students' final course grade. The students had to group themselves (maximum three students in a group) and decide on the place they wanted to be recorded. Since the aim of the activity is not thinking in advance of what to say in foreign language but acting spontaneously and naturally, students do not have to make an effort when it comes to inventing things and creating situations. The students used cameras on their smartphones/tablets/notebooks/laptops. They were instructed not to move the camera but find the right angle that would make all the participants during the conversation visible on the screen. Each student should have had an equal share in the video. The main idea was to be yourself in the familiar surroundings and act like you would have normally acted. The video recording was supposed to last for 6–8 minutes.

Since the activity was intended to be the students' pre exam task, they had a plenty of time at their disposal to do it. They were frequently encouraged to ask the teacher questions regarding the assignment. As a demonstration of what is expected from them to do a video recording made by the previous generation of students was played during the exercise classes. When they were clear about the instructions, they were informed that their own video recordings would be displayed and discussed in front of the class.

One video recording per class had been played and commented on. After playing the recording in front of the class by using a USB cable, a smartphone, a projector and

speakers, students were free to comment on it and give a positive feedback. They were also encouraged to point out what they liked most in the video and what changes should be made to improve the video clip.

The places chosen for performing this task were the places they liked the most: the coffee shops they used to visit regularly (for instance, “The essay”, a café within the University building, and “Smokvica”, the coffee shop in Bijeljina), parks in Tuzla, Brcko and Ugljevik, home gardens, cars, the students’ homes, the gyms, etc.).

The students were able to identify mistakes in their pronunciation, point at the incorrect use of the tenses and acknowledge the gaps in their vocabulary. They also notified their intonation, the stress and the tone of their voice while having an informal conversation with their friends.

The most important part of the task was their spontaneous focus on the non-verbal communication. They were able to identify and analyze their body language and gesticulation. The students’ reactions to seeing themselves as the participants of the video clip were mostly positive. They were very proud after successful completion of the task.

IV LINKING LITERATURE WITH TECHNOLOGY

Literature, as a major element of culture, is a window on all the other elements: on religion, on people’s personal beliefs, on shared views on the past, on folklore and on language itself. This is why it is good that students should get to grips with language as set down with thought, care and passion of someone who has a cultivated talent for wording (Lindstromberg 2004). Literature raises students’ awareness of the structure of the language, its expressive devices such as rhyme, alliteration and allegory, urging the students to express themselves with clarity and effect. One of the innovative ways of learning about aspects of literary language is through linking literature to digital devices. The following task assigned to the same group of students will show how teachers can make a complex literary text enjoyable to his/her students.

Task 3 The use of smartphones in literature

Being familiar with the novel the students had been reading and analyzing during the Literature classes, in particular, the 19th and 20th Century American Literature, the teacher’s intention was to establish the link between the traditional approach towards reading the Thomas Pynchon’s novel *Inherent Vice*, and another innovative reading of the novel that involves music. This darkly comic detective novel published in 2009 and adapted into a film of the same name in 2014 is about drug culture and counterculture.

The following fragment from the novel was given as a demonstration:

“Back at his place, Doc stood for a while gazing at a velvet painting from one of the Mexican families who set up their weekend pitches along the boulevards through the green flatland where people still rode horses, between Gordita and the freeway. Out of the vans and into the calm early mornings would come *sofa-width Crucifixion* and Last Suppers, outlaw bikers on elaborately detailed Harleys, *superhero bad-asses* in

Special Forces gear packing M16s and so forth. This picture of Doc’s showed a Southern California beach that never was – palms, bikini babes, surfboards, the works. He thought of it as a window to look out of when he couldn’t deal with looking out of the traditional glass-type one in the other room. Sometimes in the shadows the view would light up, usually when he was smoking weed, as if the *contrast knob of Creation* had been messed with just enough to *give everything an underglow, a luminous edge*, and promise that the night was about *to turn epic* somehow” (*Inherent Vice*, Chapter 1).

Pynchon’s novel is a suitable literary work for setting the assignment since it is famous for its rich use of allusions, intertextuality and slang. Set in the 1970s, a period that celebrates jazz, rap, surf and paranoid electronic music, the novel could easily be linked to the popular songs of that time. The writer himself has given Amazon a playlist for the novel that includes the songs of the most famous music stars and bands mentioned in the novel such as The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Roy Orbison, The Beach Boys, Frank Sinatra, The Doors, Pink Floyd, Frank Zappa, Jefferson Airplane, Roy Rogers, The Rolling Stones, The Monkees, Elvis Presley, etc. Many of these songs could also be heard in a 2014 film adaptation of the Pynchon’s novel by Paul Thomas Anderson (the students were familiar with the film since it was played on the projector during the literature classes along with the lecture on the novel).

The task was set to score extra points on the exam. Firstly, the students were divided into groups of three (1). Each group was given short book excerpts (2). Groups were encouraged to choose a song from the Pynchon’s playlist² (3), listen to its karaoke version (instrumental) on YouTube (4), make sure they were clear about the beat (they were asked to beat or tap it out as they replayed a bit of it) (5), and record the karaoke version after practicing singing the fragments chorally (6). Each group had one smartphone for playing the song and another for recording it. After the audio recording was made, each group was called out to play it.

The advantage of this task is the fact that students tackled slang words and complex language structure of the literary text they at first found appalling and inaccessible without much trouble. Since they enjoyed themselves immensely, the task was set for homework with a slight variation. They were allowed to choose their favorite song, sing the fragment out and record it. A variety of jazz, rock, pop and rap songs were played during the next class. The negative side of the assignment was the feeling of being exposed that some of the students exhibited while watching themselves on the screen.

² *Inherent Vice* full playlist was given on the following website: https://inherent-vice.pynchonwiki.com/wiki/index.php?title=Songs_mentioned_in_Inherent_Vice

CONCLUSION

Moving to a new location other than classroom when it comes to both teaching and learning a foreign language is very likely to be effective, challenging, motivational and enjoyable for students. Making audio and video recordings in the real world makes a balance between students' need to learn/acquire new things at the educational institution (nursery, private/public school, Language Institution, University) and their urge to enjoy and have fun outside the classroom. The gap between what is artificial (students acting someone else in the classroom) and real (students acting themselves in specific situations within a natural environment) reduces if students' Foreign Language Learning is linked to their real experience. Task 1, 2 and 3 placed special focus on displaying numerous advantages of encouraging students to learn a foreign language outside the classroom via digital devices such as smartphones or tablets: 1) it promotes research and communication skills; 2) it enhances professional literacy; 3) it makes students be aware of non-verbal communication; 4) it tackles the slang words and complex language structure in a literary work in an interesting and enjoyable way; 5) it links learning of a foreign language to a real life experience; 6) it makes students become more self-confident, relaxed and comfortable when speaking a foreign language.

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