

## ON TEACHING NON -ENGLISH MAJORS LISTENING AND SPEAKING THROUGH VIDEOS

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### Abstract

This is a study of the feasibility and effects of teaching listening and speaking with videos . The research is a part of the English Learning Program sponsored by Academic Affairs Office of Huazhong Agricultural University . The author introduced a pilot study conducted by utilizing videos to teach listening and speaking from September 2002 till now . The statistical result from the experiment suggests that this method has some advantages over teaching listening and speaking with the pre taped materials in the text .

### Key words

foreign language acquisition ; videos / films ; teaching English listening ; pilot study

### 1. Introduction

The past two decades has witnessed a shift of emphasis in foreign language teaching and learning from Grammar -Translation Approach to Communicative Approach since quality oriented education is gradually valued by society in recent years . Teachers have been employing various ways to develop students abilities and improve the quality of ELT . Some teachers introduce videos into listening and speaking classes and they think that teaching listening and speaking through videos can be effective .

There is no scarcity of literature on how to use videos in English teaching . Grow (1996 25 ) did research on activities based on the videos . Massi and Merino (1996 20 -23 ) discussed the selection of films . They have suggested that “ micro teaching activities should be organized according to the thematic issues and linguistic and contextual complexity in concern with the learners level of proficiency ” . Harmer (1983 21 ) thinks that “ the idea of simulation is to create the pretence of a real life situation in the classroom where students simulate the real world ” .

Some researches done by English teachers , such as Zhang Qingbo , Zhao Gongyan and Zhou Rong have shown that the effect of English teaching depends much on the learning environment and learning conditions . These researches showed that teaching listening and speaking with videos is different from the traditional listening and speaking teaching method in teaching environment , teaching method and teaching materials .

As can be seen from their study , most research is about the categorization and listing of the videos and some activities of teaching listening and speaking through videos . There exists room for more comprehensive and deeper study of the necessity , status and functions of teaching listening and speaking through videos .

In order to discover whether teaching listening and speaking through videos can improve students listening , the author conducted a pilot experiment in her class . This study lasted for four semesters and some research results will be discussed in Part 4 of this paper .

## 2 . Literature Review

This research has its theoretical bases in the Krashen s Input Hypothesis , Motivation Theory , Context Theory and Com municative Language Teaching According to Krashen s Input Hypothesis ,the teacher should not only enable students to come into contact with large quantity of meaningful , interesting or relevant foreign language input materials but also provide them with low affective filter learning environment . According to Motivation Theory ,the learner s motivation plays an important part in their language acquisition . It is vital for a language teacher to come up with some ways to motivate students . Context theory emphasizes the importance of context in language teaching and learning . Beyond teaching linguistic forms ,the teacher should cultivate students ability to use language ,especially the ability to use language accurately ,appropriately and fluently in specific contexts . Com municative Language Teaching attaches much importance to cultivating com municative competence in ELT .

## 3 . Pedagogical Reasons for Teaching Listening and Speaking Through Videos

### 3 .1 The Traditional Way of Teaching Listening and Speaking

The traditional way of teaching College English listening and speaking often goes like this :in a language lab the teacher plays the radio or operates the computer , while the students listen to the materials several times and then do multi choice exercises . Most materials are well prepared for gram matical convenience ,i .e .for a pedagogical purpose . What students are asked to do is to produce the correct but discrete forms of the previously learnt language items . Second ,these materials lack authenticity ;dialogues or short talks are prewritten ,well prepared and well tape recorded . Last but not least ,most dialogues or short talks are non contextualized ;students do not know how to use them appropriately . What s worse ,these materials make teachers reluctantly revert to the traditional teaching method —concentrating on the teaching of understanding segments of the language in a text rather than an overall comprehension of a message ,which hinders listening comprehension and the development of com municative competence .

### 3 .2 Advantages of Teaching Listening and Speaking Through Videos

#### 3 .2 .1 Providing Authentic Materials

What are authentic materials ? The term authentic has been used as a reaction against the prefabricated artificial language of textbooks and instructional dialogues .

An authentic document is defined as (1 ) one which has never been produced for language learning and language teaching purposes ;(2 ) one which has been produced in a real com munication situation . Authentic materials are the materials used in non pedagogic ,natural com munication . “ Authentic texts ” , Kram sch (1993 178 )stated ,“ require participants respond with behaviors that are socially appropriate to the setting ,the status of the interlocutors ,the purpose ,key genre ,and instrumentality of exchange ,and the norms of interaction agreed on by the native speaker ” .

Films ,like other mass media ,such as novels and newspapers and magazines ,are considered an insightful means of teaching ,for they reflect people s way of life in terms of variety ,contemporaneity and authenticity .

Films provide both audio and visual materials that help the students understand the language more easily . When watching a film ,students not only listen to the characters but also watch their movements . Additionally ,the scenes ,the props and other aspects make the verbal com munication so real that by watching the film ,students seem almost to participate in those activities . Furthermore ,in a film class ,they tend to learn in a natural way so they pick up the language spontaneously .

#### 3 .2 .2 Providing Cultural Input

The linguist Robert Lado defines the goal of learning a foreign language as “the ability to use it , understanding its meanings and connotations in terms of the target language and culture ,and the ability to understand the speech and writing of the natives of the target culture in terms of their meanings as well as their great ideas and achievements ”(Lado 1964 25 ) .

Language is a very special component of culture . As a symbolic system of human communication , it is a part of conventional culture .

### 3.2.3 Cultivating Communicative Competence

Communicative competence not only refers to the ability to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also the ability to know when and where to use these sentences and to whom .

Films show situations in which characters speak English in the real world . Through watching films , students gradually learn how to use the language appropriately in different situations . Due to the fact that they are not learning in an English speaking community , their exposure to oral communication with native speakers is limited . Films reflect people's way of life in terms of variety , authenticity and contemporaneity . Students will spontaneously acquire the aspects of society and life as reflected in films or videos .

### 3.2.4 Motivating Students

Motivation is commonly thought of as an internal driver , impulse , emotion , or desire that moves one to a particular action . William & Burden (quoted in William & Burden 1997 :20 ) constructed a cognitive definition of motivation as follows : " motivation is a state of cognitive and emotional arousal , which leads to a conscious decision to act , and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal . "

A motivated learner is one who is willing or even eager to invest efforts in learning activities and to make progress . Learners' motivation makes teaching and learning immeasurably easier and more pleasant , as well as more productive .

### 3.2.5 Introducing Variety and Flexibility into the Classroom

Harmer holds that " variety " and " flexibility " are the two overriding principles behind good lesson planning ( Harmer 1983 :220 ) . Teaching listening and speaking through videos is varied , flexible and enjoyable . The students can appreciate beautiful scenery , watch handsome heroes and heroines , listen to pleasant songs and fluent dialogues . They also can appreciate the excellent performance of the actors and actresses . They can meet favorite movie stars and acquire the target language cultures — beliefs , customs , even costumes . They can take part in various activities — play acting , speech and discussion . All these activities can really motivate students' initiative and enable them to learn in a relaxing and cheerful atmosphere .

## 4 . Pilot Study , Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Pilot Study

It is extremely difficult to evaluate language teaching methodologies empirically because of the apparent failure of applied linguistics to keep more than one variable in play at one time . A Pretest Posttest experiment , an essentially pre-scientific experiment , was carried out in Huazhong Agricultural University .

The aim of the Pretest Posttest experiment is to test the hypothesis that teaching listening and speaking through videos can make students have a higher listening proficiency than teaching listening and speaking through the materials of textbooks .

The sample population is 119 college students in two classes of College of Plant Science and Technology of Huazhong Agricultural University . They were divided into two classes by the college according to the students' scores in 2002 National Entrance Examinations . The number of the students in Class One is 58 , the number of the students in Class Two is 61 . They are sophomores now .

The author tested both groups before the experiment just to make sure the groups were really the same , especially in English listening ability . The author used the Listening Test compiled by her colleagues to test the freshmen's listening comprehension . The two groups' scores were approximately the

same . The pretest showed that these two groups were at the same level of listening proficiency .

Then the author randomly put her subjects into the control group and the experimental group . The author has taught both the group for one and half terms . In one class ,the author just teaches listening and speaking through the materials of New College English and only occasionally through videos in order to enhance their interest in English learning ;while in the other class ,from the very beginning ,the author has taught listening and speaking through the videos .

And at the end of the first term ,the two groups were retested . The test paper was the final achievement test paper for all the freshmen in the first term in January 23rd 2003 . The listening part is composed of two parts :short conversations and three passages . The total score of the listening and speaking is 20 . All the testing materials are based on what they have learned in New College English .

The two groups had a mid term test April 16th ,2004 . This term is the final term for undergraduates of Grade 2002 to take the listening and speaking course . The listening part is composed of two parts : short conversations and three passages . The total score of the listening and speaking is 20 .The listening part is directly derived from the listening part in CET Band 4 Test Paper of January 8th ,1996 .

#### 4.2 Findings and Discussion

The experiment is carried out in order to explore the strength of relationships between variables . The author wants to look at the relationship between the new teaching method and test scores on a formal test of language proficiency . In such case ,it is customary to distinguish between the two variables by giving them different labels . The label given to the variable that the experimenter expects to influence the other is called the independent variable . In this case ,this would be the teaching method . The variable upon which the independent variable is acting is called the dependent variable —in this case ,the test scores .

After the final test ,the author obtained the score for each student . The author worked out the mean ,or average ,for each group and obtained the following :

Table 1 . The Statistical Analysis of Scores of Two Groups

	Sample Size	Means	Variances	Statistic F	Statistic T
Traditional Method	58	$\bar{x} = 12.32$	$s_1^2 = 0.3456$	$F = 1.0359$ $F_{0.05} = 1.53$	$T = 62.238^{***}$ $t_{0.01} = 2.58$
Using Videos	61	$\bar{y} = 14.57$	$s_2^2 = 0.358$	$F_{0.01} = 1.84$	

$$\text{Where } F = s_2^2 / s_1^2 ; T = (\bar{x} - \bar{y}) / s_w^2 \left( \frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2} \right) , s_w^2 = \frac{(n_1 - 1)s_1^2 + (n_2 - 1)s_2^2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}$$

As is shown in the Table 1 , $T = 62.238$  ,and it is significantly greater than critical value  $t_{0.01}$  . The analysis of variance presented in Table 1 reveals that the difference between the means of the language groups is significant at the 0.01 level of confidence (that is we can be 99 % confident that the difference is significant .) It would seem to indicate that the traditional method is less helpful than teaching through videos in cultivating students linguistic competence . Pedagogically ,this would suggest that teachers should develop strategies of teaching listening and speaking with videos .

Another test took place in April 16th ,2004 . In order to keep the internal validity of the experiment , the listening part is directly derived from the standardized test — Band 4 Exam of 1996 . This mid term exam is important for students and they took it very seriously . After the test ,all the scores were processed in the computer and rechecked by the author . The following table illustrates the distribution of scores of the two groups —the experimental group and the control group .

Table 2 . The Distributions of Scores of Two Groups

Scores	The Experimental Group	The Control Group
18		/ 1
17	//// 4	
16	//////// 8	//////// 5
15	////////// 13	////////// 7
14	////////// 14	////////// 6
13	////////// 11	////////// 7
12	/// 3	//////// 6
11	//////// 6	////////// 8
10	/ 1	////////// 10
9	/ 1	// 2
8		// 2
7		/ 1
6		// 2
4		/ 1

Table 3 . The Statistical Analysis of Scores of Two Groups

	Sample Size	Means	Variances	Statistic F	Statistic T
Traditional Method	58	$\bar{x} = 11.983$	$s_1^2 = 8.2278$	$F = 2.4826^{**}$ $F_{0.05} = 1.53$	$T = 4.443^{**}$ $t_{0.01}(v) = 2.374$
Using Videos	61	$\bar{y} = 13.951$	$s_2^2 = 3.3142$	$F_{0.01} = 1.84$	

Where  $F = s_1^2 / s_2^2$ ,  $T = (\bar{y} - \bar{x}) / \sqrt{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{s_2^2}{n_2}}$ , v is the positive integral number, which is closest to the following number

$$(s_1^2 / n_1 + s_2^2 / n_2)^2 / [(s_1^2 / n_1) (n_1 - 1) + (s_2^2 / n_2) (n_2 - 1)] ; v = 95 .$$

As is shown in the Table 3, T is 4.443 and is significantly greater than 2.374. The analysis of variance presented in Table 3 reveals that the difference between the score means of the language group is significant at the 0.01 level of confidence (that is, we can be 99% confident that the difference is significant). It indicates that the scores of students of the experimental group are improved. Most scores are close to the mean. All the students listening ability is improved in the experimental group.

## 5. Classroom Applications

### 5.1 Teaching Procedures

#### 5.1.1 Pre-watching

##### 5.1.1.1 Selection of Videos

Films are available on videocassette, laserdisc, DVD and TV. They are of many types: dramas, historical actions, thrillers, science fiction and musical movies, etc. What to watch in film class remains the key question for teachers.

According to Massi and Merino (1986:90), selection should focus on the content, with respect to accent and well-thought-out criteria and the duration. The teacher should choose films in a careful and well-thought way. The following are some recommendations.

- (1) The selection of videos should be based on students' interests. Generally speaking, college

students are keen on films ,esp . films /videos about life and love . Some good films such as “ Roman Holiday ” or “ My Fair Lady ” can be used . Such films are interesting and not difficult for students . As a teacher ,he or she can select some classic Oscar films or videos .

(2) The selection of films should be based on thematic context to reinforce and consolidate what the students are required to master in the light of the teaching syllabus . If the students watch a video somewhat related to the text or unit they are learning ,they will be more interested ,and their existent and prior knowledge will be activated .

### 5.1.2 While -watching

According to different teaching aims and the difficulty levels of films ,the teacher can decide whether the students should watch the whole video ,or the video should be segmented into several parts or just certain parts are chosen to play .

#### 5.1.2.1 Watching a Video without Any Interruption

A video can be played without any interruption if it is within or a little beyond students linguistic and contextual competence . As can be seen in Item 10 in Table 3 ,55 % learners want to watch a video without interruptions . The viewers are reluctant to be interrupted . They might want to get an overall impression about the film and do not pay so much attention to details .

Through classroom observation ,the author noticed that when the teacher stopped and asked her students to have a discussion ,the students were all reluctant ,although she paused appropriately and she gave them some information ,which could activate them to view efficiently . One girl student complained that when she was interested in what would happen next ,the teacher pushed the pause button . “ We are eager to see what will happen and do not care about details .” Most students said , “ We d like to watch a video independently .”

#### 5.1.2.2 Segmenting the Video into Several Parts

A video can be played by segmenting it into several parts ,if it is beyond students linguistic and contextual competence . It can be divided by its scenes ,by the time . Different parts may contain different cultural information or different activities can be conducted based on different characters and plots . The whole video can be played from the very beginning to the end if time permits .

#### 5.1.2.3 Watching Certain Part for Different Purposes

This technique is employed if the teacher intends to demonstrate the same linguistic forms ,the same theme and the same cultural information by utilizing different videos . First ,students are asked to watch different parts in the same or different videos . After watching ,follow up activities center on the linguistic and contextual information illustrated in the videos .

### 5.1.3 Post -watching

Without follow up activities ,the teaching cannot be regarded as efficient and integral . The follow -up activities can be various . How to conduct follow up activities is determined by teaching aims ,by the video itself . For instance ,in the first semester ,the emphasis in teaching listening and speaking is cultivating linguistic competence . So blank filling exercises and role play will outnumber other activities .

The practice of follow up activities is also constrained by classroom time . If time is limited ,then less complicated activities can be conducted . If time allows ,demanding and challenging activities such as dramatization are the best choice .

## 6 . Conclusion

The present research is intended to test the Hypothesis :teaching listening and speaking through videos can give students higher listening proficiency than teaching them listening and speaking through pre taped materials textbooks .

The statistical result from the experiment suggests that there is indeed some correlation between

teaching listening and speaking with videos and a learner's listening comprehension in general in language achievement tests at certain stages.

The study is limited in terms of the number of learners, which is indeed too small to achieve any generalizations or provide any suggestions. What's more, whether their speaking is also improved by teaching listening and speaking with videos is not studied. The current experiment should provide a basis for more in-depth research.

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