

[Article]

Movies and animation in the L2 classroom: Exploring the efficacy of audiovisual media on L2 acquisition

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Abstract

A popular pastime for many second language (L2) learners is watching movies, sitcoms, and animated films in their desired language to study. This affinity for watching films is apparent to most L2 educators, however the challenge becomes making such a passive participation activity into an appropriate challenge for a mixed level class of L2 learners. This exploratory review of an implemented class activity structure, which incorporates in-class L2 movie viewing and L2 discussion regarding the viewed material, has revealed positive results in regards to nourishing L2 acquisition. The following article will explain the method of this class structure, the efficacy of these methods based on survey results, as well as a review of the author's thought structure and existing literature that lead to the implementation of this method.

Keywords: ESL, L2 Acquisition, Audiovisual media

第二言語クラスルームにおける映画とアニメーション

——第二言語習得における視聴覚メディアの有効性の探求——

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要 旨

多くの第二言語 (L2) 学習者は、身につけたい言語 (多くの場合は第二言語となる) を学ぶために、娯楽として、その言語の映画やホームコメディ、アニメを見るがよくある。L2 学習者が、このように好んで映画を見るということは、ほとんどの L2 教育者は理解している。しかし、L2 教育者の課題は、映画を視聴するという受動的な活動を、授業において、様々なレベルの L2 学習者が混在していても、各々の L2 学習者に等しく挑戦的な活動となるようにすることである。本研究では、第二言語の映画の視聴、及び視聴した映画についての第二言語でのディスカッションをクラス内活動に組み込んだ授業を行い、結果として、こうした授業構成は、第二言語を習得する上で有益であることが明らかとなった。以下、第二言語での映画視聴、及びディスカッションをクラス内活動に取り入れる方法について、先行研究を検討した上で提示し、その方法の有効性を、学習者への調査を基に示す。

Literature Review

The more exposure one has to a spoken or written language, the more opportunities they have to consider the usage and meanings implicit in that language, and thus the better the chances that the L2 learner will become proficient in the L2 they aim to acquire [Kootstra/VanHell/Dijkstra, 2012; Taniguchi, 2011]. This is best exemplified by the high rate of success in L2 acquisition among learners who have had a study abroad experience in a native speaking country of the L2 they aim to acquire [Barron, 2003; Cohen/Shivery, 2007; Taniguchi, 2011]. A study abroad experience is not possible for every L2 learner, however films, animations, and sitcoms are readily available at libraries, media outlets, and on internet viewing platforms such as YouTube. This availability of dramatic audiovisual media brings a microcosm of the L2 world into the learners study environment for a passive immersion like experience [Ismaili, 2013; Murray, 2011; Webb/Rodgers, 2009].

On its own, this passive immersion experience through dramatic audiovisual media is surely beneficial in its own right regarding L2 acquisition. However, as an educator, the question becomes: How can we maximize the L2 acquisition benefit of audiovisual media sources in the classroom? In the following Methodology section of this article, a detailed description of the classroom activities incorporated in this model will be explained.

Methodology

Prior to classroom activities, the educator is responsible for choosing appropriate viewing materials. For this research, feature length movies were used. However, that is not to say that sitcoms or other dramatic material could not be used. In this article the audiovisual media will be referred to as “movies”. Depending on the guidelines and temperament of the educational institution, some educators may have greater freedom than others in choosing a movie to watch in class. The key to finding an appropriate

movie is to find a balance between something the educator is passionate about and the learners have an interest in as well. The educator's passion for the selected material will in many cases help to stimulate L2 learners' interest and nourish their engagement in the L2 learning activities.

The class activity connected with the viewing of L2 audiovisual media proceeds as follows. First, the learners are asked to keep a writing utensil and paper close at hand. As they watch the movie, they are asked to note details and key points on which they can quiz a partner later during the conversation session. This conversation session will be explained later in greater detail. The next step is to allow the L2 learners to watch and listen to a portion of the movie. For the sake of learner engagement as well as class for the natural flow of the movie, the viewing portions were broken into roughly 15–20 minute segments. In this research, each viewing segment of the movie was played twice; the first time with L2 audio and L2 subtitles, the second time with L2 audio and the learners' L1 subtitles. Some exceptionally high level L2 learners felt this second viewing to be redundant, but given the range of proficiency held by entirety of the class, the instructor deemed this second viewing to be necessary. Additionally, given the nature of L2 acquisition, a second viewing of any portion would stand to be beneficial in nourishing L2 comprehension through repetition regardless of whether or not the L1 subtitles are utilized [Kootstra/VanHell/Dijkstra, 2012]. At the end of the second viewing session, the instructor allowed roughly 3 minutes for the L2 learners to refer to their dictionaries and solidify their quiz questions for the conversation session at the end of the class. The class time in this research allowed for roughly 3–4 viewing sessions with subtitles in both the learners' L1 and L2.

After completing the viewing sessions, L2 learners were then paired with a partner for the conversation session. As previously mentioned, while watching the movie L2 learners were asked to write questions regarding events and details from the movie as the plot progressed. By the end of the 3–4 movie viewing sessions, most L2 learners had about 4–6 questions with which to quiz a partner. In the interest of stimulating further conversations, the instructor would sometimes write a few additional questions pertaining to either the details of the movie or regarding the students' opinions on what they had watched. The parameters of the conversation session were as follows: for 5 or more minutes (as specified by the instructor) the pair must speak in their L2 exclusively, the conversation must pertain to details in the movie, and they must record their own performance on their smartphone. This last requirement was introduced due to the positive effect that self-recording paired with subsequent review and self-analysis has been shown to have on L2 acquisition [Fallon/Baker, 2017; Murray, 2011].

Survey Data

In the interest of gauging the efficacy of the class activities outlined in the above methodology, a survey was conducted to gather the insights of the L2 learners who participated in the course. The survey was administered to 34 students in the foreign language program at a Japanese university. The

survey was comprised of 6 Likert scale queries divided into 2 sections. The 3 queries of first section aimed to gain learners' insights regarding the efficacy of this method for L2 acquisition. The latter 3 queries focused particularly on the perceived usefulness of subtitled movie viewing on L2 acquisition.

Regarding the efficacy of this method, the majority of participants perceived the activities connected to the viewing of L2 media in the classroom to be an effective means by which to acquire L2 proficiency. Of the 34 students surveyed, 94% found these activities to have aided in improving their L2 listening proficiency. 71% of participants perceived these activities to have aided in boosting their confidence when speaking in their target L2. However, it shall be noted that on the contrary roughly 29% felt these activities did not benefit their L2 speaking confidence. The final query aimed to gauge the perceived benefit of the self-recording/self-assessment portion of this method. When asked if these activities help learners to realize areas of their L2 usage that need improvement, 97% of the surveyed students perceived self-recording and self-assessment to be of benefit to their L2 acquisition.

The following section of the survey focused on the participants' perceived efficacy of viewing L2 media with alternating L2 and L1 subtitles as a means of nourishing L2 proficiency. Of the 34 students surveyed, 91% felt that this method of subtitle incorporation benefited their overall understanding of the target L2. 94% of participants agreed that this method of subtitle incorporation allowed them to discover new L2 vocabulary, moreover 47% of participants strongly agreed with this sentiment. The final query in this section asked if the viewing of L2 media with accompanying subtitles benefited participants' L2 reading speed. Regarding this point, 56% of participants did not perceive any benefit to their L2 reading speed. However, in contrast 44% of surveyed students felt a perceived benefit to their L2 reading speed attributable to this method.

Conclusion

Qualitative data gathered from student surveys regarding the efficacy of viewing L2 media in the classroom with both L2 and L1 subtitles, followed by a smartphone audio/video recording session of the L2 learner's conversation pertaining to the viewed L2 media, and furthermore followed by learner self-assessment of the recorded video has proven beneficial as a means of L2 acquisition. Over the course of 10 weekly class sessions implementing this method, L2 learners perceived an improvement in their L2 listening, speaking confidence, and knowledge of vocabulary. Surveyed participants also perceived this method of L2 acquisition to nourish their general L2 understanding and allowed them to become cognizant of areas in their L2 usage that are in need of improvement. Further research into the efficacy of this method of L2 acquisition is required to make more definitive claims as to its benefits. A larger sample size of participants from diverse cultural backgrounds may affect future data as well may a longer duration of method implementation.

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