Using Media to Motivate and Promote Language Production in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom

Sylvain Bergeron

Abstract

As students are exposed daily to various forms of media, it is no longer possible to pretend that this form of communication and information exchange belongs exclusively to the world outside the classroom.

On the contrary, by making use of media resources within the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, teachers become better equipped to bring content and context to life. Therefore, guided by the work of Brinton (2001), this paper will introduce both a theoretical and practical framework designed to encourage the use of media for the purpose of motivating and promoting language production in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: media, motivation, language production, cooperative learning, student/learner-centered approach, task-based, project-based teaching/learning

According to Dörnyei (2001, p 31):

[A]lmost everything a teacher does in the classroom has a motivational influence
on learners, which makes teacher behavior the most powerful motivational tool.

Renowned for his work in the area of motivation in second language education, teacher and researcher Zoltán Dörnyei's (2001) quotation is an important statement that serves to remind educators of all disciplines that the quality of a teacher's behavior, presence and teaching approach are extremely important. After all, a teacher's choice of words, actions and attitude strongly influence and characterize the teaching/ learning environment, group dynamics and ultimately, the students' willingness to learn.

What is more, according to Dörnyei and Guilloteaux (2008), in the area of language learning specifically, motivation is understood as "the primary impetus" (p. 55) that will keep learners learning despite the challenges and hardships usually associated with studying and acquiring a second language (L2). Described in this way, the reader can already begin to appreciate that as a driving force for learning,

motivation is very much at the core of a pedagogical process that aims to make the experience of acquiring an L2 a stimulating, practical and meaningful endeavor.

Within this pedagogical process, Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) speak of the usage of certain "motivational strategies," which they describe essentially as (motivational) techniques or methods. By choosing to make use of these, L2 teachers could effectively employ them to improve their teaching skills and transform their classrooms into more interesting, active and engaging learning spaces. One such motivational technique or method, which this paper will introduce, refers specifically to the use of media to motivate learners and promote language production in the (EFL) classroom (Dörnyei and Guilloteaux, 2008, p. 55)

This paper explores how the use of media as a motivational and instructional tool in the EFL classroom of this author has provided learners with a realistic and practical L2 language learning experience that was made possible through the medium of task-based activities, in-class projects and creative tasks (Nunan, 1991). As will be described, one of the foremost reasons behind the selection of these particular types of activities is because they also allow learners to communicate and work together creatively and cooperatively, whilst bringing "the outside world and all of its complexities into the classroom" (Brinton, 2006, p. 462).

Overview

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief overview of how media can be effectively used to motivate and increase the production of the L2 within the EFL classroom. As such, this paper is divided into the following sections: In the first section titled T*ask-based methodology and a student-centered approach*, the author will describe how media can be practically applied within the EFL classrom by effectively combining Willis and Willis' (2007) task-based methodology and Nunan's (1991) learner-centered approach. In the second and third sections titled *Reasons for using media* and *Examples of media*, the paper draws on Brinton (2001) to provide various grounds for the use of media along with examples of the different types of media available. In the fourth and final section titled *Classroom application*, a unit of work which Smagorinsky (2008) describes as a "project/assignment sequence" or "lesson plan" (Smagorinsky, cited in Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013, p. 166) will be provided to illustrate the structured and practical use of media within the context of three 90-minute junior college EFL lessons.

Ⅰ. Task-based methodology and a student-centered approach

According to Willis and Willis (2007, p. 1):

…the most effective way to teach [and learn] a language is by engaging learners in real

language use in the [EFL] classroom.   This is done by designing tasks – discussions,

problems, games, and so on – which require learners to use the language for themselves.

In this quotation, we find that authors Willis and Willis (2007) are further supporting the idea that language learners learn best when they are given an opportunity to experiment with the L2 in a way that is engaging, stimulating and authentic.   In support of the use of authentic materials in the EFL classroom, Nunan (1991) suggests that "One of the great advantages of beginning with authentic written or spoken texts is that classroom work is referenced against the type of language which learners will encounter outside the classroom" (pp. 215-216).   This is a point reiterated by Cathcart (1989), who maintains that "language classroom models must be based on authentic native speaker discourse" (p. 105).

By involving learners in projects that make use of media in the EFL classroom such as the making of a short film, television commercial or a topic-specific class presentation, learners are able to reinforce their basic English language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) as they take part in a variety of authentic tasks.   In addition, taking part in task-based activities provides students with opportunities to develop collaborative, organizational and slightly more complex forms of communication skills as learners must exchange ideas and opinions, negotiate and solve problems among themselves in order to successfully complete the tasks that they have been assigned.

In other words, as suggested by Nunan (1986), "by making use of a task-based, student-centered approach/methodology in the EFL classroom, students are introduced to a cooperative, learner-centered (as opposed to a teacher-centered) style of learning that primarily utilizes specific tasks and skills requiring verbal interaction and hands-on activities to initiate and promote language production in the L2 classroom."

Ⅱ. Reasons for using media

Brinton (2001) explains that the use of media helps to stimulate and engage learners.   By presenting how the L2 is used in real-life or within realistic day-to-day contexts, learners can gain a much deeper level of cultural, generational and linguistic understanding that traditional approaches and methodologies to foreign language education often fail to provide.

For the language educator, the use of media as a supporting and supplementary tool for teaching/ learning the L2 may reduce the need for long and perhaps incomprehensible explanations.   For language learners, the use of media in the language classroom provides a wealth of visual and audio cues that serve to reinforce the core material being presented.   In addition, according to Brinton (2001), by making good use of these visual and auditory cues within the context of a lesson, learners become better equipped to

challenge the task of correctly interpreting and communicating content and meaning.

Ⅲ．Examples of media

Brinton (2001) explains that media is divided into two main categories: nontechnical media and technical media.   Nontechnical media refer to the most basic types of teaching materials found in the EFL classroom such as chalkboards, flashcards and posters.   These types of media are considered very user-friendly and can be used in classroom environments where resources are scarce and funding is minimal.   As for technical media, we find that these belong to a class of materials and equipment that are much more costly and much less user-friendly.   Examples of these may include CD/DVD player, film projector, and computer/language lab.

As today's young learners are surrounded by technology and technological gadgets of all sorts, language teachers would do well to familiarize themselves with technical media in order to, as Scrivener (2005) recommends, "…take into account the needs and wishes of the learners… rather than offering some 'off-the-peg' solution" (p. 74).

The following outline, divided into two categories, includes a comprehensive list of both nontechnical and technical forms of media that could be used effectively to support the teaching/learning process in the EFL classroom (Brinton, 2001):

Non-technical media:

◇ chalkboards/white boards   ◇ cartoons/line drawings
◇ magnet boards/flannel boards/pegboards   ◇ objects/realia
◇ flashcards/index cards   ◇ pamphlets/brochures/flyers/menus
◇ wall charts/posters/ maps/scrolls   ◇ equipment
◇ board games   ◇ operation manuals
◇ mounted pictures/photos   ◇ puppets
                                              ◇ newspapers/magazines

Technical media:

◇ record player/audiotape player   ◇ filmstrip/ film projector
◇ CD player/recorder   ◇ opaque projector/slide projector
◇ radio/television/video player/recorder   ◇ computer/language lab
◇ telephone/teletrainer   ◇ computer lab/multimedia lab
◇ overhead projector   ◇ self-access center

Ⅳ. Classroom application

Objective

This project was conducted at a local junior college during the 2013-2014 academic year.　The purpose of this project was to observe if the use of media would effectively serve as an effective motivational tool to stimulate, initiate and promote the use of the L2 by having students take part in a task-based, learner-centered project broken down into a unit of work equivalent to three 90-minute lessons.

Method:

1. Site

The research site used for this observation consisted of the junior college's English conversation lounge, which was used twice weekly for a duration of 90 minutes as the students' club activity room.

2. Participants

Consisting of an all-female cohort of twelve first and second year junior college students, the students took part in a task-based, learner-centered project centered on the creation of a short promotional film to introduce their after-school club activity; namely, the English Speaking Society (ESS club), and to describe some of the activities that are conducted within this club.　The level of the students' English-speaking ability ranged from false beginner to high intermediate.

　　　Students who chose to become members of this club were primarily attracted to the idea of being able to continue to learn, maintain and improve the L2 skills that they had acquired since junior high school. For others, the ESS club also represented an opportunity to brush up on L2 conversational skills that they had gained while taking part in short-term EFL programs abroad such as in the United States of America, Canada and Australia.

3. Pedagogical materials

• Scripts

• Props

• Recording equipment

• Computer equipment

• Editing software

• DVD player & viewing screen

In regards to the necessary instruments and materials needed to accomplish the various tasks involved within this project, the making of scripts, which the students had prepared ahead of filming, helped the

students to effectively create dialogs to support the actors' speaking roles.   The availability of a locale in which to make the film and the use of readily available furniture, classroom equipment, and English-language board games, made useful and effective props while at the same time, adding a touch of reality to the students' filming.

To record their promotional film clip, the students were given access to a hand-held and easy-to-use video recorder.   Access to computer equipment with which to view and edit the students' production was also made available.   In the final stage of their project, free editing software such as "iMovie for Mac," made it possible for students to edit their work and present the final version of their film in a professional-looking manner.   Finally, access to a DVD player and wide screen television made it possible for the students to enjoy a long-awaited viewing of their completed project.

4．Procedure

In outlining the procedure by which the author and the students approached and undertook the various tasks involved in the realization of this project, an overview of the unit of work representing three distinct yet interrelated 90-minute lessons is presented below:

Overview of the Unit of Work: Lessons 1-3

Lesson	Content of the Lesson
1	Ss will be introduced to a task-based project centered on the making of a short film to introduce the ESS Club. Individual roles will be delegated. Ss will begin preparation in the following areas: Script writing/narration, acting, set/prop making. Key vocabulary/expressions: Focus will be on using future tense expressions to describe the process/progression of the project: "I will make a/an…"/ "She will draw a/an…"/"We will say…"/ They will build a/an…"
2	Ss will begin/continue work in the areas of script writing/narration, acting, set/prop making. Ss will also begin to practice speaking and acting parts (first rehearsal) in preparation for filming in the next club meeting. Key vocabulary/expressions: Focus will be on using present continuous expressions to describe the process/progression of the project: "I am making a/an…"/ "She is drawing a/an…"/ We are saying…"/"They will build a/an…"
3	Ss will conclude all work in the areas of script writing/narration, acting, set/prop making, and filming. Ss will take part in a final rehearsal prior to filming. Key vocabulary/expressions: Focus will be on using past tense expressions (including regular/irregular verbs) to describe the process and stages of progression: "I made a/an…"/ "She drew a/an…"/ We said…"/"They built a/an…"

The reader will notice that along with the delegation and completion of tasks, key elements of the target language were also integrated in all three lessons/ESS club sessions, so that the students could experience and challenge the use of the L2 within a hands-on and practical real world context.

The lesson plan overview shown below, represents the first of three 90-minute lessons in this unit of

work.   It provides a model by which all three lessons could be similarly integrated or modified to best suit the objectives, needs and interests of the class as a whole.

Lesson Plan Overview for Lesson 1
Recommended Model for Unit of Work: Lessons 1-3

Lesson Plan: Overview				
Objective: The students will create a short film to introduce the ESS Club				
No.	Activity	Time	Teacher's activity	Students' activity
1	Introduce Ss to project's objective.	20 min	Introduces project to Ss	Listen carefully & take notes
2	Assignment of individual roles.	10 min	Introduces & assigns roles to Ss based on preference	Take on an acting or supporting role
3	Discussion of speaking parts and scenes.	10 min	Provides examples of speaking parts & scenes	Discuss potential speaking parts & scenes within the classroom
4	Discussion of props and sets. Familiarization with filming equipment.	20 min	Provides examples of potential props & sets to be created within the classroom. Introduces filming equipment	Discuss potential props & sets to be made. Delegate tasks within the group Ss begin work on props and sets Familiarization with equipment
5	Writing of narration scripts.	20 min	Provides examples and guidance regarding script writing	Narrators begin work on speaking parts/scripts
6	Wrap-up	10 min	Reminds Ss of project objective and what has so far been achieved. Provides brief overview of next lesson's preparation procedure	Listen to T and make prep notes for next lesson
Reflections: Allow more time for preparation. Next lesson: Ss will continue/begin work on speaking parts/narration, acting roles, making sets & props.				

５．Reflection on the motivational effectiveness of the unit

From the author's position which involved fulfilling a three-fold role of instructor, guide and facilitator, in-class observation and monitoring of the students' delegation, organization and execution of tasks in a second language, merited all who took part in this project with a passing grade.   Although the evaluation process was informal and no letter grade or numerical score was awarded, the students' teamwork and combined efforts leading to the successful culmination of their project would in the end become their greatest reward and this author's best feedback.

Observation of students' engagement during the unit of work suggests that the use of media tools/ sources supported by task-based, learner-centered activities did effectively motivate students to increase

their use of the L2.   Furthermore, viewing of the completed product elicited postive affective responses from students: laughter, applause and expressions of a sense of accomplishment.   Based on the positive results of this study, it is this author's opinion that this type of approach and methodology could be effectively transferred to other junior college and/or university-level EFL classes as long as the learner-centered element is maintained and that the tasks and projects are selected and designed primarily with the students' interest and needs in mind.   Doing so will motivate the students and increase their willingness to experiment with the L2 despite the difficulties and challenges involved.

Conclusion

In the words of Brinton (2001), media and the very present role that it occupies in the everyday lives of students can no longer be ignored.   As a powerful motivating influence, the use of media in the EFL classroom contributes richly, positively and constructively to the language teaching process.   In support of Brinton's (2001) arguments, Wilson (2011) encourages all L2 educators to "make use of available technology [and media] in the EFL classroom" (Wilson, lecture, November 21, 2011), as this type of approach and methodology, as seen in the author's observation of the unit of work on which this paper is based, allows for a highly effective, appealing and enjoyable form of motivation in second language education.   Echoing a similar sentiment, teacher-educator Jeremey Harmer (2007) concludes this discussion by reminding all EFL instructors that "the [media] resources that are currently available are truly amazing… [f]or they offer an amazing variety of routes for learning and discovery."

Acting as both facilitator and guide to this learning process, instructors who adroitly combine the use of media to support language learning will for the benefit of students, introduce a more attractive and motivating way to make the journey of acquiring English as a second or foreign language a practical, successful and meaningful one.

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言語学習者の学習促進に向けて
― 外国語としての英語学習 (EFL) におけるメディア利用法 ―

シルヴァン・ベルジュロン

　授業内でのメディア使用は、学習者中心・タスク中心の教授法／学習法 (learner-centered, task-based teaching/learning) の実践を可能にし、また生徒同士の協同学習 (cooperative learning) をも生み出す。ドナ・ブリントン（2001）の論文「言語指導におけるメディアの使用」(D. Brinton, "The Use of Media in Language Teaching", 2001) に言及しつつ、本論文は外国語としての英語学習における言語生成促進に有効なメディアの種類とその利用法について考察し、新たな論考的且つ実践的な論説を提示する。