Chapter 7
The Benefits of Student-Led Video Production in the Language for Business Classroom

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The use of video in the language learning classroom has long been seen as a way to enrich the student experience and to increase student engagement. This case study presents a good practice example of student-led video production tasks. The project which is analysed here was conducted with undergraduate students of German at Aston University in Birmingham, UK. It examined student responses and student achievement in relation to a number of different video-based learning activities and explored the potential of student-led digital video production in a language for business context. Results of the study highlighted the various benefits of using video production tasks with language learners. In particular, the data demonstrated how video-based tasks embedded in a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach and supported by adequate scaffolding, such as task-based learning structures, provide collaborative learning opportunities and increase students’ confidence.

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ORGANISATION BACKGROUND

This study is primarily based on data collected at Aston University in Birmingham, UK. Aston has had a languages department since the 1970s with a strong focus on language in contemporary society and applied language study (Aston University, 2016). High graduate employability is a key objective. The university offers a wide choice of degree programmes that mostly combine the study of French, German or Spanish with either a second language subject, with Translation Studies or a with a social science. Single Honours programmes also exist in all three ‘major’ languages. The most popular language degree, accounting for up to 50% of language student intake at undergraduate level, is the International Business and Modern Languages (IBML) programme, founded 30 years ago and run jointly by the School of Languages and Social Sciences (LSS) and Aston Business School (ABS). Teaching on the IBML degree follows an integrated approach and provides students with a language learning experience that is specifically tailored towards developing language skills for a professional business environment. One of the main focal points of this chapter will be the use of video in a ‘language for business’ classroom as created for students with a business studies profile.

An important aspect of Aston’s applied language study approach is the university’s strong commitment to Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), a pedagogical method where language and discipline-specific content learning are integrated flexibly along a continuum, without a stated preference for either, that can be adapted to the needs of the respective educational setting. CLIL as an educational approach “makes underlying use of some of the theoretical models that have been pivotal in the last few decades” (Ruiz de Zarobe, 2013, p. 234), among them Cummins’ distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). When implemented effectively, CLIL fosters both general linguistic development and discipline-specific content knowledge and understanding. To do so, students must be “cognitively engaged” and “intellectually challenged in order to transform information and ideas, to solve problems, to gain understanding and to discover new meaning” (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 29). Beyond these subject-related goals, CLIL also aspires to further the learners’ knowledge and understanding of the culture(s) where their target language is spoken and to foster (inter)cultural awareness and sensitivity. These skills form an important aspect of successful intercultural marketing and are thus especially relevant for one of the sub-projects analysed below.

In line with the CLIL approach, the large majority of classes in Aston’s Languages and Translation Studies section (LTS) are taught and assessed in the target language. IBML students take specifically designed courses about the business environment
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