Chapter VIII

Research-Based Listening Tasks for Video Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of listening tasks performed by second-semester learners of Russian. Two video viewing conditions are investigated: traditional, “exposure only” vs. an experimental, “viewing guide” condition. In the control group, learners are watching video episodes from beginning to end; after that they answer comprehension questions. In the experimental group, students are using online Video Guides designed for the present investigation, which include research-based listening tasks performed by the learners during video viewing. The research examines which of the two treatments produces greater comprehension and retention of the videotext as measured by (1) Immediate Recall Protocols (IRPs) written in English and (2) recall, recognition, and application tasks performed in Russian. In addition to objective tests, the researcher investigates participants’ opinions regarding the effectiveness of video viewing under each of these conditions as measured by an Exit Survey.

INTRODUCTION

Background

In the last three decades, researchers and practitioners in the field have begun exploring broader contexts of L2 learning (Iskold, 2002), including tasks and activities which aid in preparing students who can understand and be understood in L2 and are sensitive to the culture(s) where L2 is spoken. The move toward communicative instruction revived the concern for teaching the receptive skills of listening in L2 (Iskold, 2003). Lending support to listening skill development are studies showing that adults spend 40 to 50 percent of their time listening (Rivers, 1975). In our age
of heavy media saturation the percentages for listening became even higher (Omaggio Hadley, 1993). Therefore, listening becomes an increasingly vital skill in L2 learning which explains the professions’ interest in authentic video materials. However, video-based language teaching lacks a significant data base (Bacon, 1992; Herron, York, Corrie, & Cole, 2006; Thompson & Rubin, 1996) and few research data are available concerning which tasks and activities make “video viewing experience more profitable for students” (Herron, 1994, p.196).

How do students develop listening skills by using video materials? Do they learn best by mere “exposure” to “comprehensible input” advocated by Krashen (1985)? In contrast, cognitive models advocate L2 learning in which students are consciously involved (Harrington, 2002); a more recent, sociocultural approach, places L2 acquisition in a context of social practices (Savingnon & Sysoyev, 2002; Warschauer, 1997). While there is a recent improvement from passive, non-interrupted watching of long videotexts to brief, electronically delivered user-controlled video segments, the focus on pre- and post-listening activities still prevails. But what are learners doing while the video clip is playing? Should they be performing low-production tasks? Which tasks lead to higher levels of video comprehension? These questions, among others, have not yet been answered on the basis of empirical evidence. Lack of research regarding the listening tasks which best facilitate L2 comprehension (Herron et al., 2006; Iskold 2003), and the current focus on pre- and post-viewing activities recommended by authors (for example, Lubensky, Ervin, McLellan, & Jarvis, 2005; VanPatten, Marks, & Teschner, 2004) of video-driven commercial packages, leave instructors with no guidelines for designing listening tasks which may help students to stay focused while they are watching a video.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study investigates two conditions of video viewing: “exposure-only” (students watch a video episode in its entirety without any interruptions) and using online Video Guides specifically designed for the present experiment (participants perform low-production listening tasks while they watch a video episode). The purpose of the study is to determine whether or not the differences in video viewing conditions result in significantly different levels of comprehension of a videotext by second-semester learners of Russian.

Research Questions

The research addresses the following questions:

1. Which of the two video viewing conditions (“exposure-only” or using a Video Guide) appears to produce the greatest comprehension of a videotext as measured by Immediate Recall Protocols (IRPs) written in L1?

2. Which of the two conditions appears to produce greater achievement on immediate recall, recognition, and application tasks conducted in L2? It is assumed in the study that (1) no participant has previously seen the video episodes chosen for the study; (2) ability to write a recall protocol is a valid measure of students’ video comprehension, and (3) no participant has serious hearing impairment or visual problems.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are tested:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the effects of “exposure-only” to the videotext condition as compared to “video guide” condition, based on comprehension
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