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Windows Movie Maker in the English as a Foreign Language Class

by Nicolas Gromik

When I was a high school student, my history teacher showed documentaries on the school's film projector. When I participated in a teacher-training program, we learned the importance of the VHS video player as a tool for learning. Now, as an educator, I incorporate multimedia elements, including textbook publishers' DVDs, teacher-created materials, and student films, into every lesson. More recent technological advances have made it possible for teachers to access authentic audiovisual resources directly from the Internet via Web sites such as friction.tv, where users post videos with an eye toward sparking debate; lonelyplanet.tv, where people can post and view videos about travel experiences; or beeline.tv, which allows users to access televised programs from across the world.

These resources benefit the modern classroom, but they are often used in ways that leave ultimate control over content with the instructor, thus diminishing student agency in the process of learning. The project described here takes a different approach. In this article, I describe my experiences designing and teaching my Multimedia English course, in which I ask my Japanese university students to use authentic audiovisual resources to become producers of knowledge in the foreign-language classroom. [Windows Movie Maker](#) has played a crucial role in the success of this course.

Research on Teaching with Video

My approach in Multimedia English has been informed by an extensive review of the literature on teaching with video and multimedia. Much of this research has been devoted to determining the usefulness of video as a medium for delivering instruction. For example, Bassili (2006) conducted a study of college freshmen in a psychology course in order to determine whether they preferred face-to-face or streamed-video lecture delivery as a learning aid. He found that a majority of the students preferred the online video lectures. These findings imply that videotaped content, far from being a less effective vehicle for instruction, might actually increase learner motivation and interest in course material.

Other articles outline the advantages of taping learner performances and asking students to watch and reflect upon these recordings. For example, some scholars have found that using videos as reflective diaries can promote critical thinking and reflection and thereby enhance learning development. Researchers have found that making reflective videos can benefit both teachers (Barton and Haydn 2006; Gebhard 2005) and students (Triggs and John 2004). As Hoelker, Nimmannit, and Nakamura (1999) and Liu (1997) assert, the ability to see oneself perform can be beneficial and revealing for a learner. Levy and Kennedy (2004) found evidence for this assertion within the specific context of the language learning classroom. They used computer video capture to record students' behavior during their audio conferencing study of Italian as a foreign language. The researchers found that these recordings became an effective tool for assisting students in visualizing and subsequently correcting their errors (57).

Several other articles have discussed the potential impact of using videos in foreign language study. Herron, Cole, and Corrie (2000), for example, offer evidence that showing videos in the classroom allows instructors to expose language learners to authentic cultural information. Moreover, research suggests that Internet-based audiovisual resources can be effective language learning tools. Hanson-Smith (2004) describes the pedagogical benefits of using online videos as in-class learning resources. In addition, she lauds the fact that the Internet is increasing access to professional audiovisual resources that are free, authentic, and suitable for language learning development.

Finally, many scholars have noted the benefits of implementing a video production component in language classes. For example, at the college level, Katchen, Morris, and Savova (2005) have explored the possibility of using video production to engage language learners, asking students to produce vocabulary-focused videos. They contend that the benefit of their approach is twofold. First, it allows students to produce videos using grammatical forms and lexical items that are relevant to them, increasing the chance that these forms and terms will be retained. Second, it facilitates the creation of learning resources for future students. There is also research that supports the use of video for younger foreign language students. For example, Sharp (2005) describes a class video project suitable for middle school students. Based on his research, Sharp advises starting out with simple, group-based projects when implementing video production in the middle school classroom. This advice can easily be extrapolated to the college-level classroom.

The research provides insight into teaching with video and presents several effective approaches, but also suggests the need for further experimentation and inquiry. While research on the advantages of using student-led video production is emerging, much of it fails to explore the benefits of requiring students to take ownership of the entire video production process; in such cases, video editing remains a teacher-managed activity. My project explores the potential benefits of using video production in language learning instruction and, additionally, of extending student control to the editing process. In my university-level Multimedia English course, students use video production to gain greater control over their learning experiences and thereby increase their proficiency in English.

Using Microsoft Windows Movie Maker

A wide variety of film editing software is available, ranging from freeware to more professional alternatives. Unfortunately, professional software packages can present educators with challenges that can make implementation difficult. For example, site licenses for such packages may not be affordable for institutions with limited budget allocations. In addition, foreign language teachers need to be aware that professional software is often more challenging for students who are not proficient in English (the language in which much of the software is written) or familiar with video editing software. Windows Movie Maker video editing software is an appealing alternative. The software is user-friendly and easy to navigate, minimizing anxiety for students unfamiliar with video editing. Users can simply select, click, and drag an icon onto a film segment and the software will apply the preset action represented by the icon.

In order to capture and edit footage in Windows Movie Maker, students begin by recording footage on a digital video camera. The camera is then attached to the computer using a FireWire cable and the footage is downloaded; the user may choose to download all of the footage or capture specific segments ([Exhibit 1](#)). Once the video is stored on the computer, the editor can easily access the video editing functions offered in the program's editing environment ([Exhibit 2](#)). Descriptive keywords for essential functions are easy for learners to comprehend; students simply need to become familiar with video elements such as transitions, effects, titles, and credits. Once the teacher demonstrates how to navigate the software, students can quickly master basic editing procedures and become comfortable operating Movie Maker independently.

Integrating Filmmaking into Instruction

Before I selected a specific program for the class, my first step was to familiarize myself with the basic editing features of various video editing programs. This was a vital step, as it made me realize that while students would find filming easy, editing would be far more demanding and would require careful guidance from me. Taking time to familiarize myself with the software and the editing process helped me determine where and when I should intervene to minimize frustrations and ensure that students felt tasks were achievable.

The second step was to obtain access to equipment such as video cameras, tripods, and digital videotapes. I

explained the aim of the course to our school's technical advisor, verified the lending rights of the department, and reserved the equipment in advance. Finally, I created a borrowing schedule.

The third step was to collect information concerning students' access to technology outside of class and design a syllabus. Campus facilities are equipped predominantly with Windows-based computers, and evidence gathered over the last four years indicates that students who participate in my classes tend to have greater access to Windows-based machines than to those that use other operating systems. As this meant that most students would be able to access Windows Movie Maker editing software, I designed a syllabus that would expose students to the use of this particular editing program.

The fourth step was to design a task and criteria sheet ([Exhibit 3](#)). I designed the task to fall well within students' linguistic and technological reach, thus allowing them to practice and become more confident with the filming process and the editing software while practicing English language skills (Chapelle 2001; Hughes 2003; Skehan 2003).

The Multimedia English Course

Participants in this program are Japanese second-year university students from various departments, including engineering, law, and the arts. They have seven years of prior English language learning experience, primarily focused on reading, writing, and listening comprehension. When they enter my class, most students have rarely had the chance to acquire or practice speaking skills.

The Multimedia English course is a required class, offered in weekly 90-minute sessions throughout a 15-week academic term. The aim of the course is to provide students with opportunities to speak with limited teacher guidance or prompting. The course asks the students to investigate and apply language that best fits their needs during the process of creating video skits.

Empowering Students

The skits are designed to empower students to explore and develop their skills in language and technology use by providing them with an authentic learning activity. Authentic activity is described by Chapelle (2001) as a "task that the learner is likely to encounter outside the classroom" (56). I do not claim that this assignment is authentic because it will help students find employment in the movie industry; however, due to the pervasiveness of audiovisual resources in home computing activities, an increasing number of students are making and editing movies outside the classroom, or at least have access to the means to do so. Furthermore, building on Pica's (2000) research, I contend that these skits are authentic foreign language learning tasks because they require students to use language to meet a personal goal and to learn to speak in a natural manner.

My approach to demonstrating the use of video equipment was informed by DuFon (2002), who asserts that the less demonstration videographers receive, the more they will experiment with the tools and strategies of filming. Kern and Warschauer (2000) found facilitation of self-guided studies to be a vital learning strategy. In this course, I provide very limited instruction on camera operation. Happily, the technology lends itself to this approach; digital video cameras are fully automated, and students need only know where the power button and zoom controls are located in order to get started. Camera positions, lights, and microphones are all aspects of moviemaking that they can investigate on their own.

In pairs, participants must make three one-minute video skits about a topic related to their school lives. These topics can include club activities, social interactions, or ethical classroom behavior. Learners are provided

with reading material to guide them during the editing session. Two in-class workshops are provided that allow students to experiment with editing the first video skit. Unless students request assistance, they receive no support for editing their second and third videos.

The Benefits of the Approach

Moviemaking allows various perspectives, concepts, topics, and cultural influences to stimulate student collaboration and discussion (Hoelker, Nimmannit, and Nakamura 1999). Wenden (2002) asserts that in order for language acquisition to occur, the task needs to involve learners in the process of acquiring new language features. While collaboration and interaction provide an ideal setting for language investigation, script writing and filming provide a purposeful context in which language can be explored. In addition to writing their scripts before beginning to shoot the video, students are asked during the video sessions to pay attention to forms, negotiate the meaning of their dialogues, and edit parts of the script which are unsuitable or difficult to portray on video. Such flexibility is possible because students can easily preview their performances prior to returning the equipment to the teacher. In returning the camera, the students indicate that they have made a conscious decision that the performance is the best they can do. This approach to learning requires students to take responsibility for the progress of their own performance.

Prior to the editing stage, I review the raw footage that the students have produced. The students' preedited videos reveal the extent to which they:

- ~~Practice their scripts~~ ~~Practice their personae and slang~~
- Practice their speech
- Improve upon their dialogues
- Make efforts not to use their native language

The preedited video is not graded; I simply use it to gauge each student's progress with the activity.

Students, too, end up viewing and reflecting heavily on the strengths and weaknesses of their performances and uses of the target language as they move into the editing process. Students often comment that they have never had the opportunity to see themselves speak English with friends, and the editing process is a great revelation to them. It allows students to observe their own:

- Speaking mannerisms
- Use of nonverbal cues
- Tendency to revert back to their native language
- Uses of body language that reveal nervousness
- Pronunciation and intonation

During the editing stage, I usually talk with students to explore their reasons for selecting certain scenes rather than others. Conversations usually reveal that students can be highly critical of their performances, sometimes wanting another chance to film a scene. Students will notice their body language, presence, and speech volume as well as the framing, background noises, or passers-by in the background. This heightened attentiveness to even the smallest details suggests that the editing process encourages students to view their performances much more critically than they might otherwise, increasing the likelihood that they will learn from watching their own performances on video. By empowering students to take control of the editing process, the learning task and the course structure allow them to become autonomous learners; as Wenden (2002) would express it, learners "become their own teachers" (38).

Some Guidelines for Adopting and Adapting the Approach

Windows Movie Maker is user-friendly; however, teachers should be familiar with the software before attempting to expose their students to a new technology. Personally, I enjoy experimenting by making travel documentaries, but there are many genres and styles teachers can use to explore video technologies prior to teaching with them. For example, teachers may begin by videotaping class performances such as speech presentations or show-and-tell sessions. Teachers can also familiarize themselves with these technologies by visiting online video viewing sites, which often offer audiovisual demonstrations created by educators, consultants, and amateur videographers. Several factors have contributed to the proliferation of such online video content, including the falling cost of digital video cameras and the prevalence of software such as Windows Movie Maker.

When searching for Web sites that can store and display school audiovisual resources, teachers must remain aware that the Internet is a public arena and many online video-sharing sites provide access to explicit content. The presence of such content may detract from the educational experience for students who want to share their videos with friends, relatives, and other students.

When considering publishing students' productions online, teachers should be aware that they must receive student, parental, and institutional consent prior to putting any videos or photos online. I would recommend that teachers work with their school administrations when choosing an online video storage site. It would also be advisable for teachers and their administrations to draft a consent form for students to sign. (Local requirements may also demand that parents give consent for students below a certain age.) Moreover, teachers need to explain at the beginning of their courses that productions will be stored online. They should provide both students and their parents or guardians with a link to the site where materials will be stored so that all parties can access course materials.

Not all students like to have their videos accessible online; their wishes should be respected. Students should be allowed to opt out of public posting of their work. In such cases, if teachers want to display student work to the class, they should provide student productions on a CD or DVD.

In my classes, I include links to these sites in the syllabus. Also, I remind students during the editing stage that their videos will be viewed online, thus offering them an opportunity to verbalize their consent to have their videos delivered over the Internet. Once all the videos are edited and submitted, I briefly talk with the students about their willingness to have their videos displayed online. By this stage, my students are fully aware that the videos are available over the Internet, and I have their consent forms stored in my files. If a student decides later that he or she no longer wants the video available online, I remove it promptly.

Student Feedback

Once students have completed their videos, one class is allocated for viewing the presentations. This session typically provides students with an opportunity to reflect and comment on the benefits of having completed the project. Because students are often absorbed by the visual quality of the movies, they usually make remarks to each other about how acting in a particular role was difficult or discuss the advantages of using a particular location for a scene. By the end of this viewing session, I usually have to remind them of the weightier challenges they have overcome—that is, that they completed the project independently, made efforts to speak English fluently, and used the technology effectively to produce the final video. That reflection helps students to realize the extent of their accomplishments and the educational merit of their projects.

Conclusion

My experience in Multimedia English suggests the utility of asking students to use multimedia in the foreign language classroom. Richards (1990) explains that the role of the foreign language teacher is to provide a purpose for utilizing the target language; the moviemaking process provides such purposeful motivation. Not every student will want to become a professional video producer, but some might become home-movie editors, or they might be required to use video editing software in a future job. With the current revolution in online video and portable video viewing devices, it seems both appropriate and useful to acquaint students with video editing technology; indeed, this technology will likely only become increasingly important in the long term.

Moreover, students benefit from integrating video production and editing into their language learning experiences because participating in the entire production process affords learners multiple opportunities to view and reflect upon their uses of the target language.

This article described the implementation of an English as a foreign language syllabus with an emphasis on video production. This approach was facilitated by developments in Windows application software that brought movie editing to the classroom. With the use of video production and editing technologies, language learners can now become empowered to express themselves across public audiovisual forums.

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