TESOL and Digital Video Media Integration in the Classroom: Introduction

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Digital Video Media and Linguistically Diverse Students

In 1992, TESOL published its first book addressing the use, selection, and production of video for English language classrooms (Stempleski & Arcario, 1992). Since the publication of this volume, video technology has advanced considerably; the world in which we live is marked by the widespread availability of inexpensive recording and editing devices and programs as well as the ease of publishing and accessing videos online. Digital camera functionality embedded in cell phones has become increasingly ubiquitous. According to research from Strategy Analytics (Shah, 2011) and InfoTrends (2008), it was estimated that worldwide camera phone sales exceeded 1 billion units in 2011 and would exceed 1.3 billion units in 2012. Video editing programs that support major video formats can now enable novice users to create professional-looking videos and motion pictures that may include numerous innovative animation techniques, visual and audio effects, text comments, and subtitles.

Nowadays, digital media technologies are pervasive in people’s everyday lives. This is most evident among younger people. For example, a survey by InfoTrends (2007) shows that most 13–24 year olds in the United States use camera phones for taking pictures or videos on a daily basis, and they were satisfied with the features and ease of use. As of February 2011, YouTube had 490 million users worldwide, generating an estimated 92 billion page views each month. People spend approximately 2.9 billion hours on YouTube each month, and 48 hours of video are uploaded every minute (Statistics, n.d.). The younger generations, which include many who have already chosen to live much of their social lives in virtual space, often share and exchange instant messages with embedded videos and pictures via blogs and websites such as Facebook and Twitter. Social media–related YouTube statistics show that, on average, more than 400 tweets per
minute contain YouTube links. Meanwhile, on Facebook more than 150 years’ worth of YouTube videos are watched every single day (Statistics, n.d.).

For the past decade, literature regarding the digital divide has raised concerns about equal access to digital technology among linguistically and culturally diverse students. The “digital divide” refers to the fact that historically underserved segments of society, including the urban poor, new immigrants, and those in remote rural communities, have little access to the new information and communication technologies whose use by mainstream students is growing rapidly. An earlier study conducted by Mossberger, Tolbert, and Stansbury (2003) in the United States showed that teens who had high-speed Internet access were more likely to be White and had college-educated parents with annual household incomes higher than $50,000, although the “digitally disadvantaged” lower income and minority teens often shared many of the same positive orientations toward technology as their more privileged counterparts. Mossberger et al.’s results also show that African Americans are more positive in their attitudes toward technology than their White counterparts in many respects, contrary to public assumptions.

Recent data indicate a shift in the digital divide as a result of mobile technology, with cell phones leapfrogging connectivity roadblocks for low-income and minority populations. Teen smartphone owners in the lowest household income category are most likely to use their handset to go online (41% with income under $30,000 versus 23% over $75,000; Purcell, 2010). Studies of differences in youth media use by race and ethnicity reveal that minority youth in the United States spend about 1.5 hours more each day using their phones for activities such as watching videos and television than did White youth (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Eighty-one percent of Hispanics have used a video-sharing site, compared to 76% of African Americans and 69% of non-Hispanic Whites (Moore, 2011). Although this may indicate that the digital divide is diminishing, and online video sharing popularity steadily grows, limited evidence is available of the pedagogical benefits of integrating digital technology into English language teaching practice. Two fundamental questions remain unanswered. Will ELLs be interested in learning English language skills through viewing or producing digital video? What learning outcomes will result from the integration of digital video into classroom instruction?

APPLICATION OF DIGITAL VIDEO MEDIA TO TESOL

As mentioned earlier, recent studies indicate an increasing utility and strong interest in digital media among diverse populations. The findings from a study in the United States (Li & Snow, 2012) show that urban middle school students expressed different levels of interest in using technology for language and literacy learning purposes. When surveyed about using four media platforms for learning (i.e., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and cell phone text messaging), the students
were most interested in YouTube. More important, ELLs in the study were gener-
ally more interested in using these platforms for learning purposes than their
native-English-speaking peers were. The difference in interest between the two
groups in using YouTube for learning language and literacy skills was statistically
significant, with ELLs again expressing greater interest (Li & Snow, 2012).

A growing body of articles has emerged documenting effective English lan-
guage teaching practice that incorporates the viewing and production of video
clips (e.g., Dhonau & McAlpine, 2002; Goldman, 1996; Rowland, 2007; Swaffer
& Vlatten, 1997; Vanderplank, 1993). This literature reports on the findings
of research that has specifically investigated the impact of video media on ESL
and EFL students’ identity confirmation, learning attitudes, and behavior (e.g.,
South, Gabbitas, & Merrill, 2008) and assessing learning outcomes in terms of
English language skills (e.g., Chen, 2011; Chung, 1999, 2002; Hanley, Herron, &
Cole, 1995; Markham, Peter, & McCarthy, 2001), pragmatic competence (e.g.,
Louw, Derwing, & Abbott, 2010), sociocultural knowledge (e.g., Herron, Cole,
Corrie, & Dubreil, 1999), and critical analysis skills (e.g., Ajayi, 2012).

Some recent studies that directly address the development of specific language
skills using video have had promising results. For instance, Wagner (2007, 2008,
2010) investigated the impact of video on the listening comprehension of adult
ESL students. His quasi-experimental study (Wagner, 2010) reveals that nonver-
bal information in video texts contributed to students’ enhanced performance
in comprehending aural information relative to audio-only texts. Wagner uses
his findings to make a convincing case for the validity of including video in the
assessment of listening comprehension (see Chapter 9 in this book for a detailed
review of Wagner’s studies). Another study, by Louw et al. (2010), shows that a
pedagogical intervention using video was effective in helping ESL professionals
develop specific pragmatic skills and facilitate intercultural communication in
the workplace through simulated job interviews. An automatic video and tran-
script synchronization system called SynctoLearn, developed by Chen (2011),
was found to be helpful for EFL students. This system “uses speech recognition
technologies to automatically synchronize voices in audios and videos with their
respective transcripts” (p. 117), thus enabling students to make better use of
authentic videos and reducing their cognitive loads and anxiety levels. Chen’s
research compared two student groups watching video with and without using
synchronized subtitles, and his findings show that the former outperformed the
latter in comprehending the video content and learning vocabulary items.

Building on the existing literature, the present volume provides TESOL educa-
tors and researchers with reflections and insights based on firsthand experiences
in teaching practice and research from a variety of contexts that integrate video.
ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book consists of nine chapters, including the present introduction chapter and a final chapter that reviews research on the use of video with ELLs in the United States. Chapters 2–8 report on original case studies, all reflecting on effective and engaging ways that teachers and researchers in several countries have incorporated video, including motion pictures, into their teaching practice to enhance instruction for ESL and EFL learners. These case studies are based on sociolinguistic and second language acquisition theories; as a whole, they demonstrate that ELLs in the 21st century need to adapt social practices for communicating with digital tools in multiple social and cultural contexts, that is, to “navigate, make meaning from, and be critical of more than print modalities” (Toohey & Dagenais, this volume). Under these circumstances, interacting with and creating video via multimedia might be among the best means of enabling ELLs to learn language skills in an engaging, enjoyable, and meaningful way.

Chapters in this volume are arranged by alternating topics across countries collectively connecting to the major theme, so readers can start with any chapter following their personal interests. The contributions made by international authors reflect their TESOL teaching experience and research results, applying digital video to language education in Asia, the Middle East, North America, and South America. The volume includes research reports with a focus on pedagogical implications as well as documentation of action research conducted by TESOL classroom practitioners—all in consideration of robust theories of language acquisition and learner motivation. Though the format of each chapter is flexible, all of the case studies comprise references to prior studies, descriptions and evaluations of actual classroom experiences integrating digital video, and the impact of these experiences on teaching and learning. An overview is given to introduce each chapter’s pedagogical significance, research contributions, or both.

In response to the rapidly evolving and digitally based nature of contemporary communication, Lotherington and Sinitskaya Ronda in Chapter 2 propose to revise the concept of communicative competence, going beyond reading, writing, listening, and speaking in terms of printed texts, to also include navigating, designing, linking, programming, and sharing dynamic, multimodal texts. Their case studies involve two groups of linguistically diverse first-generation immigrant learners in urban neighborhoods in Canada, showcasing how communicative competence can be redefined for digital multimedia environments in the context of the English language classroom—how the use of screens can create fundamentally different language learning spaces. One of their projects involved diverse 4th- and 5th-grade students using digital media to interpret and construct the abstract quality of beauty in a personally meaningful way; the other engaged 11th-grade students in learning English with Facebook. The authors introduce
the notion of *intermedial flows of meaning* (Elleström, 2010) to address the complexities of communicative competence in multimedia contexts.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on how video provides opportunities for the expression of cultural knowledge and identity construction among ELLs. In Chapter 3, Toohey and Dagenais describe three videomaking projects by Canadian teacher candidates with diverse ELLs in a Canadian school, with Tibetan children learning English in a boarding school in northern India, and with Spanish-speaking learners attending bilingual English and Zapotec lessons at a community library in Mexico. The chapter focuses on how video affords opportunities for learners to represent their own cultural knowledge and practices in ways that would be impossible in typical classroom print and verbal tasks. The findings demonstrate that videomaking is a promising classroom practice that, if embraced by young students, could potentially promote language learning.

Chapter 4 presents case studies in which Eamer and Hughes explore middle school ELLs' knowledge of digital media to support their language learning and adaptation to life in Toronto, Canada. Eamer and Hughes describe ELLs with limited English proficiency using multimodal forms of expression—images, music, and narrative in both English and their native language—to author digital poems and stories. These digitally authored texts provide the students with a forum to construct, negotiate, and communicate their identities as new Canadians. As a result, the authors argue that multimodality can facilitate ELLs' learning of a variety of vital English language skills, such as vocabulary building and organizing ideas for writing and speaking.

Although the development of language skills is certainly an important aspect of all work presented in this volume, such skill development becomes a more primary focus in Chapters 5–8. In Chapter 5, Yeh describes a photostory project that engaged undergraduate EFL students in Taiwan in creating motion pictures by combining visual arts and English lyrics to tell stories that were visually and emotionally captivating. Yeh illustrates project procedures that effectively encourage students to apply their language skills by integrating personal experiences with an appreciation of music and the arts.

In Chapter 6, Li and McComb document the positive impact of a filmmaking project on the English language learning outcomes, and particularly vocabulary acquisition, of undergraduate ELLs in a Canadian university. The chapter shows how filmmaking that is based on carefully written scripts and allows for personal interpretation of characters can create optimal opportunities for students to develop English communication skills and acquire vocabulary. Li and McComb provide a pragmatic approach for motivating linguistically and culturally diverse ELLs while nurturing more interactive learning in multimedia environments.

In Chapter 7, Cunningham reports on a project that enhanced Japanese EFL undergraduates' oral English proficiency and critical thinking skills by involving them in deconstructing advertisements and creating their own digital
commercials. Cunningham’s study intends to bridge the gap between language acquisition and critical thinking that can occur in EFL classes by taking advantage of multimedia venues to promote critical thinking while at the same time ensuring that students learn to communicate effectively using spoken English.

Chapter 8 also focuses on the use of video production to promote effective oral communication. Gromik reports on a case study conducted in Qatar, describing Arab female undergraduate students’ use of cell phone technology as well as their perceptions of using the cell phone video recording feature to enhance their speaking abilities in an academic English program. Gromik found that inquiry-based video production activities, which required students to explain technical processes and express opinions verbally using academic English language, were most suitable and beneficial for EFL learners at advanced levels of proficiency.

To complement the case studies throughout the book, Chapter 9 provides a thematic literature review of 11 research reports on the use of digital video as an educational medium for ELLs in the United States. Edwards, et al. focus on how video-based activities can impact various language learning outcomes for ESL students. They identify some important characteristics of video-based projects that may be particularly beneficial for improving learners’ language skills, such as the richness of contextual information and the availability of English captions.

CONCLUSIONS

Today’s students’ abilities to take in, learn, and process information are dramatically different from those of previous generations. To effectively enhance ESL students’ various language skills, pragmatic knowledge, and cultural competence in order to assist their effective communication in English and adjustment to life in English-medium countries, English language educators need to leverage digital media technology to create fluid, enjoyable, interactive, and collaborative learning environments. It should come as no surprise that digital video technology is of particular interest to ELLs; students are drawn to its visual appeal and vibrant creative potential. Teachers can use video to contextualize their lessons and provide students with authentic language experiences that would be otherwise unavailable in the classroom. As demonstrated in this volume, video can be an effective and powerful tool for teaching and learning English. It has provided many new opportunities for extending students’ attention spans, teaching them challenging language skills, eliciting creativity, and supporting learning with social scaffolding (Gee, 2003, 2004; Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978).

This volume contests a notion that used to be widely held—that the use of technology in language education is predominantly limited to computer-assisted language learning and online distance learning. Working in the context of the face-to-face English language classroom, the authors report on data-driven teaching practices and classroom-based research that affirm, and in some cases broaden, theories relevant to teaching and learning a second language. How-
ever, we are aware of limitations due to methodological constraints such as small sample sizes and qualitative self-report measures. Therefore, in terms of future directions for teaching and research in this area, we believe “more large-scale, longitudinal research with quantitative measures is needed to further clarify the nature of the relationship between specific instructional uses of digital video and language learning outcomes” (Edwards et al., this volume).

Second, although the constantly advancing functionality of digital media may foster an enthusiasm for using such media in the English language classroom, this may not necessarily lead to positive learning outcomes. Thus, procedures and techniques for incorporating digital video media into the classroom should be carefully defined to promote implementation that is well aligned with research-driven learning principles (C. Snow, personal communication, February 16, 2010).

Third, because video demonstrates a great capacity for ELLs to see, hear, and read (with captions) the target language simultaneously in contextually rich environments, the impact of video on a broader range of language skills beyond listening, vocabulary, and pragmatics needs to be assessed. This particularly includes the development of reading and writing skills by integrating digital video technologies for ELLs.

Finally, the quality of video used for TESOL purposes can be further improved, with additional features to support learning and instruction, such as annotations and interactive glossaries. We hope that this volume can inspire more thoughtful work in this area, including innovative interventions using well-defined pedagogical principles and research with robust methods.

As the teaching of nonnative language and literacy continues to adapt to the fast pace of change in literate communication, it is important for TESOL professionals to observe both (1) the shift from the largely paper-based communicative competencies of the 20th century to the largely screen-based communications of the 21st century (Lotherington & Sinitskaya Ronda, this volume) and (2) the benefits of keeping instruction aligned with the interests of today’s technologically savvy students (Cummins, Brown, & Sayers, 2007; Warschauer, 2011).