Film editing in the EFL classroom

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A review of the literature reveals that film editing as task-based language development activities has received little attention, and that consideration should be given to the language the software used for film editing is formatted in. This article reports on the use of filming and editing activities by intermediate and advanced university Japanese students of English as a Foreign Language learning to demonstrate the effect of the language software upon the learning development. Finally, this article documents how through this activity students were able to utilize their prior knowledge of English to develop new language awareness while performing their filming task.

Language teachers regularly rely on videos and other such audio-visual resources to expose students to particular focus on form, or engage them to think critically about specific issues. Film making and editing on the other hand is a new teaching approach which is yet to receive much attention in the literature, and yet it allows the role of the student to shift from reflective viewer to knowledgeable content producer. Due to an overwhelming technological presence students are becoming more exposed to various computer skills and are exploring new avenues to communicate and express their opinions. By capitalizing on their prior knowledge of the target language and the technology, film editing enables them to share their view of the world to other learners as well as develop lifelong learning skills which are more relevant to them.

The aim of this article is to report on the outcome of using prior knowledge in combination with filming and editing tasks to introduce second year undergraduate Japanese university students of English as a Foreign Language to language performance. First this article reviews some of the literature available reporting on the use of film making and editing as tasks, to reveal some of the issues concerning students' language performance during this activity that need addressing. By focusing on the issue of software language and communicative exchange while filming the second part describes this author's educational setting as well as some of the stages of film making and the editing process to document how these affect students' language development and performance. Whilst it could be argued that not every student might want to become film producers, Dufon (2002) suggests that filming and editing might play a stronger

role in teacher training to provide them with research data collection skills to, for example, improve the outcome of their research. Consequently, this article suggests that filming and editing offer students the opportunity to gain exposure to real computer operation as well as offer meaningful language development activities. Finally, this article asserts that filming and editing can turn learners into experts about their own culture who inadvertently become creators of a product for viewers in other parts of the world.

Literature on filming activities

The literature available discusses the use of film-making as a teaching strategy in foreign language class (Kondo, 2002; Ryan, 2003), a tool to assist in training teachers (Coniam, 2001), or to justify the use of digital video in the language classroom using SLA hypothesis (Tschirner, 2001). Other research provide evidence about appropriate use of classroom video recording for SLA research (Dufon, 2002), action research on the use of video recording to evaluate both verbal and body language expression of learners (Hoelker, Nimmannit, & Nakamura, 1999) and the acquisition of cultural information through viewing embedded videos (Herron, Dubreil, Cole, & Corrie, 2000). Whilst Gromik (2003) provided an account of using dfilm.com as a writing stimulus, Kamhi-Stein, Besdikian, Gillis, Lee, Lemes, Michelson, and Tamaki (2002) gave a report on students creating and editing a film for online delivery, and Hada, Ogata and Yano (2002) documented an interesting suggestion about editing potential for improving language correction. From the literature it could be deducted that students due to their current socio-economic surroundings are becoming more and more a group of individual increasingly attentive to visual forms of expressions possessing finely tuned viewing skills (Herron et al., 2000), as well as living in societies condoning efficient and extensive technological aptitude.

Film editing as a language enriching computer mediated activity thus offers the opportunity to enhance students' acquisition of the target language. For example, students have the opportunity to select their best performance during the filming and editing stages (Hoelker et al., 1999; Tschirner, 2001). In addition, the final edit of the students' performance can be an excellent source of authentic material to be used by future students, demonstrating that the task is achievable (Ryan, 2003). However there seems to be little evidence to reveal the strategies and procedures which students develop to achieve their aim.

Very few texts are available which explicitly describe the language acquisition outcomes of such a teaching approach. Potential important research aspects not yet available from the literature are: the editing software's language and the language used by students to discuss either filming directions and/or editing strategies. Finally, from Glass's (1992) report it is possible to understand that until recently, video making and editing was very much a teacher's role and the acting was the students' task, whereby thereafter they had a chance to view their performance (see Sharp, 2005). However this paper will reveal that students have much to gain by taking control over the whole process of video making and editing.

These issues are of importance when evaluating the contribution filming and editing activities can bring into the language classroom and when observing the language acquisition gained by participants. This paper attempts to offer some comments about these particular issues.

Editing Software Language Format

Reporting on the integration of a filming activity at a Japanese university, Ryan (2003) does not mention whether or not students were using an English or Japanese version of the editing iMovie2 software, for example. This would have a fundamental influence over the purpose of the editing activity. Furthermore it would explain why students might be able to successfully complete the task in six 90 minute lessons (p.15). This section attempts to extend on Ryan's findings by describing the educational setting of a film editing class conducted at Tohoku University to demonstrate the importance of the software's language on the students' learning outcomes.

Second year students participating in the Multimedia English course have completed seven years of English studies; six years at school and one foundation year at university. Thus the aim of the film editing activity is to assess whether or not based on their prior knowledge of English, students have the ability to select appropriate linguistic forms, to respect relevant grammatical structures and to negotiate the accuracy of their output to create a film script.

The Multimedia English course is available to all students regardless of their major and/or language abilities. Hence it is possible for a class to be comprised of low-intermediate Law undergraduates with intermediate Nursing students. Class size and gender ratio depends on students' interest. This author conducts the same course for two different groups of learners, an advanced group (6 to 12 students) and an intermediate classes (20 to 30 students). Participants attend a 90 minute class once a week over 15 weeks. While filming is conducted during the first four weeks, editing is scheduled during the following four weeks. Students unable to complete their task by the allotted due date in class are to finish the editing process during their spare time.

To complete their task, students work in pairs to design and produce their films. The intermediate students are required to make three one-minute movies. The advanced group is required to make two five-minute mini-documentaries, one requiring them to interview a foreigner on campus of their choice, the other focusing on touristy parts of the city where Tohoku University is located, Sendai. All movies must be in English, and suitably edited for online delivery.

Students borrow one of two digital video cameras available from the department. Once they return the equipment, their films are saved on the teacher's computer as well as on individual CD-RWs. Thereafter, the editing class resembles a workshop environment and is conducted in the computer laboratories, which are equipped with Microsoft Windows XP, including Movie Maker (MM) video editing software. All computers have their operating systems and application software in Japanese.

Due to time and equipment constraints intermediate students use the computer laboratory facilities. Only the advanced group has access to this author's computer to edit their films using the English version of MM. What ensues is a reflection on the consideration and outcomes for selecting appropriate editing software.

The operating system and editing software available in most computer laboratories is in the national language, in this case Japanese. When the author first considered including filming and editing as part of the curriculum, this situation was taken into consideration. Based on other projects, this author came to the following conclusion.

Operating basic software such as Word or PowerPoint in the target language is feasible for university intermediate students (see Gromik, 2005). However, operating editing software and thinking about all the editing possibilities within the time allocated, is a much more complex task. In addition, it is not financially feasible to purchase English based computers and/or software licenses for large groups of students. Therefore to provide intermediate students the opportunity to develop a script, to act out their scenarios and to reflect on their performance, it was decided that using the Japanese editing software would be appropriate. The students' learning and performance outcome validated this decision.

During the editing process students' were observed to plan, and evaluate their editing strategies, where they mostly listened, viewed and adjusted their performance. They also learned to operate software to bring their performance to a viewable standard. Hence there are two aspects to this task; listening and editing. These will be reviewed simultaneously.

When planning the editing stage, students come face-to-face with their performance and what it is like to become a viewer of their work. This might stimulate them to either improve, or give up, although this last option seldom occurred in the current study. They begin to generate a plan for selecting the particular film segments, investigate the software to reach their desired objectives. They also exchange ideas with their colleagues and communicate with other class members to consider new editing concepts.

By encouraging students to "cut out" unnecessary sound, they become more alert of their sound bites, such as humming, or reverting back to Japanese, usually when a mistake occurs. Once they have cleared out all the unnecessary parts of their film, they can begin to focus on selecting their preferred performance. Meticulous students filmed many takes of the same sequence constantly attempting to improve the product. Editing requires learners to make decisions as to which was their best effort, and students have commented that they selected a particular performance based on their overall presence or the way they delivered their dialogue.

Once the filming is finished, students can no longer adjust the content of their script. They can, however, adjust the delivery of their message by including pictures, narration, muting sound and/or adding music, and they can combine effects to bring meaning out of their film. Editing allows for a variety of these combinations.

Intermediate students were encouraged to edit one film each simultaneously to speed up the process. This approach motivated students to discuss editing strategies within their group. The author assisted students with any technical problems and/or editing strategies. However due to class time constraints and students questions, only broad and general editing strategies were discussed.

Advanced learners, on the other hand, received one-on-one editing strategy discussion time. Because they had access to this author's English computer, more time was allocated for discussing the operation of the editing software. One group, for example, spent two sessions of four hours non-stop each to edit one five minute film.

This experience led to the conclusion that based on the learners' language and technical abilities requiring intermediate students to use English editing software might be at first beyond their ability. Editing is an activity which requires conceptualizing the cause and effect of visual cues as well as being able to logically position those cues to create a final interest-

ing film. Therefore exposing students to editing operation with software in the mother tongue will reduce the burden on the learners and allow them to view the task as enjoyable and achievable.

To validate this argument the following situation was observed. Two intermediate students enjoyed the film editing class. After completing the course they decided to participate in the advanced class. Their previous use of the Japanese editing software empowered them to operate the same software in English with more confidence. These students were aware of the editing potential and were able to create a longer film, the outcome being that communication during the editing stage was in English. This observation might need further investigation as there are still very few studies that seem to investigate first versus second language software language use.

During both the filming and editing processes, students interact to give directions and exchange ideas. The issue of language choice also affects this aspect of film making and forms part of the discussion below.

Language for Interaction

Previously, this paper referred to Ryan (2003) as well as Hoelker et al. (1999) to indicate that few articles do not seem to mention the language used by their students to discuss the creation of the film and the editing process. Hoelker et al. (1999) report on an action research study assessing Japanese and Thai students' filmed performances, but it is not made explicit as to whether or not the students used the first or target language to give directions during the filming process. To elaborate on this issue, this section offers a reflection based on all the pre-edited productions provided by this author's students.

For better or for worse, this author does not speak any Japanese. The benefit is that students must communicate in English during the whole film making activity, that is, from simple digital video camera operation, to consideration of weather conditions to audio effects. During these discussions, it has been noticed that the conversation is no longer about lexical item definition or grammatical structures; it becomes about intended software operation objectives. Students attempt to explain the problem and understand the solution. By letting students decide when to seek out assistance, they become active agents involved in their own learning. This approach has revealed that students attempt to use technical terminologies shifting from "How do I use a picture?" to eventually "How do I import a picture?", where "import" is the specific editing software term.

However, when students engaged in discussions amongst themselves, they often reverted back to Japanese. Even with advanced students who used the teacher's English version software and were in the teacher's office, conversation was eventually conducted in the first language. This led to the conclusion that because the aim of the activity was to produce a film within a specific amount of time, conversation in Japanese expedited agreement in film directions and editing objectives. Thereafter, they were observed to be more content with engaging in English discussion about their decisions as well as being more fluent with their explanations. Only two pairs of determined advanced students were able to conduct the whole editing process in English. Their pre-edited film however revealed that direction discussions were conducted in Japanese.

By contrast, due to class size, it was noticed that not all intermediate students made an effort to communicate with the teacher about their film editing progress. Therefore the author usually attempted to spend time with each group to ensure that the target language remained at the center of the activity.

Such a learning environment might seem less than conducive to language acquisition, however students' feedback revealed that they were "happy" with their achievements as the activity gave them confidence to use English on their own accord. Students' commented that at first becoming independent learners was difficult but eventually they developed a familiarity with the task of designing and editing a film. Even if some students did not maximize their communicative opportunities with the teacher and/or their colleagues, the simple experience of creating a film and editing it with a computer was an accomplishment that they all found rewarding.

So what exactly gave them the sense of achievement that would be deemed appropriate for language development? The next part documents the activities that students completed to design their film.

Task-based learning, focus on form and technology

Although it could be argued that students need to be exposed to certain linguistic forms in order to develop their knowledge and ability of the target language, Pica (2000) comments that it is possible to make selected language forms available to students in indirect ways. Following Pica's comments, the author engaged the learners in reviewing the meaning and accuracy of their script. Through this approach, reflection was used to stimulate prior knowledge and investigate new options. This section describes the strategy to support the consolidation of prior knowledge.

Collaboration is one strategy to provide students with the opportunity to use prior knowledge to operate either the target language or the technology to meet their objectives. The students' diverse language experiences and their group's similar and yet different approaches for using their prior knowledge of the target language were observed to provide a platform for analyzing new linguistic features. For example, one group of student was faced with the problem of wide language abilities, whereas one student had high language ability, while the other was not able to provide as much language as he would have liked to. Nonetheless both students worked effectively and patiently to write their script to an agreeable standard. The more able student commented that they often had to re-write the script to make it more accessible for his partner. This article suggests that the team member's knowledge of different lexical forms might have led to investigation of new forms which were not provided by the teacher, but were needed to create an authentic scenario. In which case, the script writing might be thought to have encouraged meaningful communication and contribution.

While students could potentially be exposed to new linguistic input from their colleagues, filming is primarily an output activity generated from collaborative input exchange, focus on form and intention of expression as well as the students' ability to negotiate meaning to produce a comprehensible dialogue. While writing their script or during the filming process, students have been observed to plan and evaluate the outcome of their dialogue.

The planning stage is the activity which engages students in forming the purpose of their film. At this stage they already begin to form a perception of what the end product will resemble.

It was observed that some students seemed to primarily deduct meaning from the written words rather than the visual effect that their dialogue will generate. Students seemed to think that because the dialogue was written and it made literal sense, that the audience would understand what they intended to express. This can occur if the students have a good grasp of the target language. However, it can also create a real monster with neither head nor tail. The author usually lets students plan and prepare their rough drafts, then lessons are specifically allocated to discuss and demonstrate how story boards function.

Story boards are in a completely different format from writing a script. It involves the visual intentions or pictures which describe the scene and requires that the dialogue be written under each picture. This is a very important feature of script writing because it answers a lot of questions such as where, when and how the interaction between the characters will take place. Through designing story boards, students might be able to visualize the effect of the dialogue on a particular scene and how that particular segment will be interpreted by the viewer. Also it will help them when eventually filming their role play.

This author observed that once students' realized the benefits of story board outline, they began to restructure their dialogue and bring more meaning out of it, thus experiencing the benefit of writing purposefully and logically. Their script tends to metamorphose reflecting a truer communication exchange, with a more comprehensible logical expression of thought leading the viewer along the path of their intended meaning.

Once students grasp the benefits that story board provides to the writing task, they decide to adjust their script and its meaning. At this level, however, students also decide to amend and restructure their work. They might decide to change the topic or to change the purpose of the conversation of their script. Adjusting is a decision that students make.

During the process of adjusting their performance, students were observed to apply the following strategies. First they read and evaluated the meaning of the story and attempted to reword the inappropriate dialogue segments to something which is in their opinion more comprehensible. During this stage the majority of students rely on their dictionaries to find more appropriate words or phrases. While undertaking this task, some students noticed that due to the changes, the story needed updating and therefore other parts of the dialogues were amended. Depending on the difficulty of the story some students approached the teacher to ensure that the overall plot was not lost. This is when teacher and students had a chance to discuss the intention of the dialogues and attempts were made to write a more authentic script.

To ensure that students were completing their work in order to achieve the overall task, the author regularly checked students' written work. Communication was about the writing task, errors were not corrected unless they affected the meaning of a sentence, the plot, or it affected a student's pronunciation. For example, a student wrote "we pick up Hachiman Jingu". Hachiman Jingu is a temple in Sendai. This author said the term "pick up" in a questioning tone, and the students looked at each other and a discussion ensued to explain why the term "pick up" seemed to be appropriate. The discussion led to the conclusion that in Japanese it is possible to "pick up" a temple, as in "I will focus on this temple", but "pick up" did not seem appropriate in English due to its literal connotation.

Filming – Evaluation Opportunity

Once the script was written and students were satisfied with their efforts, they were ready to film. However, even during this final stage, students evaluated the accuracy of their work. Role play usually triggered students to really understand what they were saying and to utilize body language and/or intonation to emphasis their intended meaning. In order to make their camera recorded conversation comprehensible, students decided to place more emphasis on rhythmic patterns and articulation ensuring that their words were clear.

Discussion with intermediate learners revealed that some rehearsed their speech well in advance. One observed outcome was of a student who read over his script two hours prior to filming on site. Although this student remembered the speech verbatim, the language performance was stilted with recorded evidence of his attempt to remember his lines. Another group commented that they did not spend time rehearsing. Their strategy was to read and remember the script and to film this segment straight away. The outcome was a more native like performance.

Placing more emphasis on prior knowledge and giving students control over the writing and filming process provided them with a sense of achievement. The feedback indicated that at first they did not think the task was achievable, but by the end of the editing stage they could visually witness the outcome of their efforts.

Such rewarding outcomes were not achieved without the teacher experiencing some challenging moments during the term. The last part reflects on what this author has learned from offering filming and editing as task-based language learning activities.

Teachers as facilitators.

To empower students to use their prior knowledge and to negotiate meaning of new lexical items, as well as develop comprehensible input and output abilities, the task must offer students the opportunity to converse for a meaningful purpose. It must fit their ability and level, as well as provide them with the chance to focus on the language necessary to undertake the task. The activity must also be authentic in the sense that it resembles genuine and native like verbal interaction, assist learners to develop linguistic skills at both the cognitive and metacognitive level and finally be practical as well as achievable (Beatty, 2003; Chapelle, 2003; Pica, 2000). Offering such a task does not eventuate without any challenges. For example, due to the number of participants and films being produced, it was not possible for the author to check all films and provide individual advice, which would have made the task unachievable given the term's schedule constraints. Motivating students to develop an interest in filming, expressing their opinion, as well as providing them with the equipment to film their work and eventually a location to edit their work, was demanding on the teacher's schedule. Also ensuring that the task itself meets the curriculum requirements, and gambling on whether or not students possess sufficient prior knowledge to undertake the task, could be at time stressful. Finally technological difficulties happened on occasion, and saving films appeared to be the most demanding aspect of video editing.

Finally to overcome the technical fact that the operating system and editing software available on the computers were in Japanese, one strategy implemented was to provide students with an English editing guideline. Such resources can be retrieved from the

Internet and used as indication that the filming task is completed and a transition to a new task is in progress. Giving a booklet to students about the necessary tools required for the editing process reassured them that information about this task was accessible. Such booklets could also be used as a point of reference, hence reducing the perception of teacher as source of knowledge. Intermediate students were not aware that the software was in Japanese. Therefore during the pre-editing training sessions, students were engaged in learning about the operation of such software in the target language.

Offering the film editing course for two consecutive years has revealed that preparation and organization are the key to bring such a project to maturity.

Conclusion

Viewing videos is a beneficial language development activity however it maintains the role of the student as a viewer of other people's productions. Film and editing task-based learning activity on the other hand engages learners to become autonomous and responsible users of the technology to define the purpose of their video to target a particular audience. This paper revealed that missing from the literature was evidence about the language of the software and amongst students. Focusing on these two issues, this paper offers some comments about students' verbal interaction as well as their ability to operate the technology to complete their task. By comparing larger intermediate groups with smaller advanced classes, this paper suggests some of the aspects of incorporating such a task in the EFL curriculum. What became apparent was that although advanced learners gained much from using English video editing software, during the filming and editing stages both groups seemed to primarily communicate in the first language. However some evidence demonstrated that prior experience in operating the editing software empowered advanced learners to become more confident to communicate about such resource in the target language. Students were observed to design, plan and evaluate the outcome of their film scripts. The article suggests that the filming stage allowed students to reflect on their dialogue delivery, and the editing task empowered them to manipulate the technology to render their performance more aesthetically enjoyable. This paper contends that filming and editing tasks are suitable and invaluable technology based learning experiences favorable towards language learning acquisition.

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