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The University Grapevine

For University English Language Teachers

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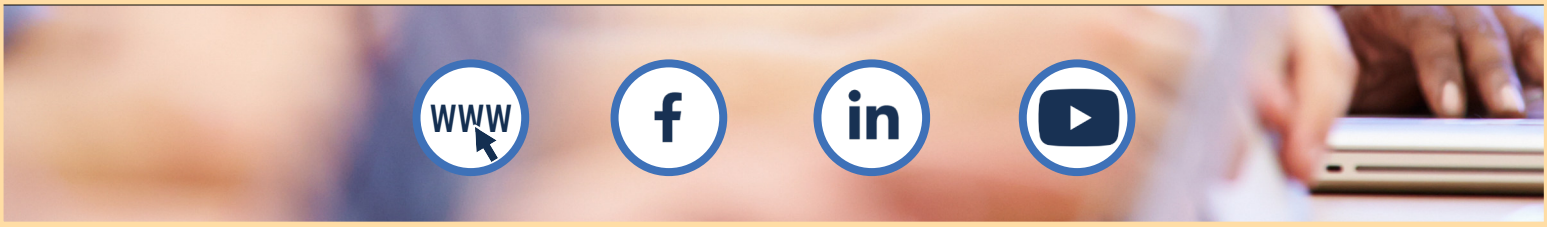

From the Editor

Welcome to our first newsletter issue of 2024! I hope that you have all had a chance to recover from what was a landmark year in teaching last year. We were kept very much on our toes with the birth of AI in our classrooms and made to rethink just about everything we were doing.

That being said, I'm sure 2024 will be a great year for progress with our students in terms of the way we teach them and help them to learn. Good luck to you all and please keep your great articles coming in!

And if you are new to *The Grapevine*, please also feel free to follow it on YouTube, LinkedIn and Facebook to be a closer part of what we are doing together.

Robert Stroud (TUG Editor)

Feel free to e-mail me. You can also find me on LinkedIn, ResearchGate and Academia.

Videos as Reciprocal Reinforcement in Vocabulary Acquisition

Brian English,
Tama University

Teaching Goal

In Second Language Acquisition, "reciprocal reinforcement" means designing lessons so that comprehensible input triggers comprehensible output to build a deeper understanding of the targeted language structures. I have had challenges with trying to make this connection when it comes to designing vocabulary-building exercises. For my upper-level university students, I have had difficulties in guiding them away from just translating words and relying on rote memorization of vocabulary to encouraging them to use new vocabulary in context. University teachers of any level, and especially those teaching content-based classes should be able to relate to my dilemma, "How can I facilitate a deeper understanding of new vocabulary for my students?" It was through designing materials for my Global Issues: Wealth and Poverty class that I came up with an interesting approach of providing homemade videos as comprehensible input to first trigger highly intentional guided output in the form of cloze exercises; and then, move toward less intentional guided output in writing assignments and presentations.

Approach

I started making videos that go together with cloze exercises. The visuals in the videos help to activate schemata, a necessary step toward deeper processing of vocabulary. The audio for the videos becomes intentional input using the target vocabulary. I use the finished cloze exercises for listening activities that help to develop phonemic processing of new words, and for reading exercises that help to develop structural and semantic processing. I usually also make crossword puzzles with using the same target vocabulary to reinforce the semantic processing. The final stage for encouraging a deeper processing of vocabulary is to assign short writing exercises or presentations in which the students are required to use the target vocabulary.

This approach begins with making a cloze exercise and then turning the cloze exercise into the audio track for a video.

Step 1: Write 1 – 4 paragraphs using the target vocabulary. This "script" should be tailored for your students and the lesson topic.

Step 2: Turn the script into a cloze exercise in MS Word by selecting all the target vocabulary words and then changing those words to white font with dark underline so they are blank spaces on the printed page. You can do this using the font options.

Step 3: Using software to make an audio track, read the whole script including the blank words. This will become the soundtrack for the listening exercise. I recommend using an app like Voice Memos so it can be placed as the soundtrack in iMovie on an iPad. This process tends to be both fast and easy.

Step 4: Once the sound track is finished, you can begin to add photos (or video) that are relevant to the topic. This is easier than it sounds. Using Google, enter relevant words and do an image search. Save the images you want to use in your photos folder and then add them to the video you are making on iMovie. For example, in a video I made about the global water crisis, the cloze exercise worksheet had target vocabulary such as "industrial pollution" and "drought". I inserted pictures of industrial pollution and drought into the video at the points those words are mentioned. The pictures become the "comprehensible input" for the listening exercise.

Step 5: When you have added enough photos to correspond to the recorded voice over you can finish up the video with some introduction music and titles and export it to your files.

Step 6: Print out the cloze worksheet and pass it out to your students. The video can be played in class or put on a YouTube channel so your students can watch at home if you are using a flipped-classroom approach.

The previously recorded voice over is the "intentional input" to expose students to the target vocabulary in context. Doing the cloze exercise is a form of highly intentional guided output as students select and write words in the blank spaces on the cloze worksheet.

As mentioned earlier, I also add a crossword puzzle to reinforce the semantic and structural processing of vocabulary. This is fairly easy to do using a crossword puzzle maker like the one at Discovery Education. Just add the words along with the clues and it will create a crossword puzzle in seconds. I have found that these are good for pair work as students like to work together on crossword puzzles.

After completing several units, students do short writing assignments or presentations in which they need to use the target vocabulary that was introduced in the videos and cloze exercises.

Pros and Cons

Using multiple-choice vocabulary quizzes, presentations and short writing assignments as formative assessment tools, I have been able to gauge the effectiveness of using this approach for long-term retention of vocabulary. Quiz scores and analysis of writing assignments indicate this approach has mixed results. Some students score very high on the quizzes while others still have challenges understanding the target vocabulary. I believe one reason for this is that my classes have students with a wide range of fluency levels. The more proficient students benefit because their "i + 1" level is in sync with the level of target vocabulary. Lower proficiency students still struggle with more basic vocabulary. However, I have noticed that while using this approach, there is greater interaction between the high-level students and lower-level students (albeit in L1) with regard to the material and vocabulary. I observe students discussing the words and the material together. I think this helps to foster an understanding of new language among all students in the class. Perhaps, an unseen advantage of this approach is that it should, by design, trigger individual students to meta-linguistically reflect upon what they do not know, or only partially know in regards to L2. They become aware of the gaps between understanding input and their ability to create output. That is the basis for reciprocal reinforcement in Second Language Acquisition.

One point I should mention is that I have noticed while showing videos in class, many students don't watch the video because they are focused on the cloze worksheet. Therefore, I now show the class the video before passing out the worksheet because the main purpose of the video is to provide comprehensible input and trigger schemata using images. After the students watch the video once, I give them time to work on the cloze exercise, then we watch the video again. Finally, I call on individual students to read as we check the answers together.

Although making videos is time consuming, once the material is made, it can be used over and over by both teachers and students.

I still have students that rely on translating the target vocabulary while doing the exercises. However, I do believe visual input does make a lasting impression of what the target vocabulary words mean. Like the old saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words."

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How to Publish a Teaching Article

Please follow the guidelines to submit an article to the newsletter:

Content:

Ideas that help ESL/EFL university teachers around the world improve their craft are warmly welcome. Some topic suggestions are: online teaching, student motivation, classroom management and teaching material design.

Language of Submission:

All articles will need to be submitted in English.

Length of Submission:

Ideally, articles should be longer than 500 words and no more than 1500 words.

Editing:

Please check your spelling/grammar carefully as it cannot be corrected for you (and the article may not be published).

Citations:

Citations/research data are not necessary. If you do want to include some, please keep them to a minimum.

How to Submit:

Submit your article by completing the boxes in the template and sending this file directly to robertstroud@hosei.ac.jp.