THE DIVINE DIVX: FREE SOFTWARE WITH PRACTICAL PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS

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Abstract

This paper has two purposes: first, to report the efforts of a teacher and parent to increase the use of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) by his two elementary school age children while living in Japan; second, to explain how digital video clips are an excellent method to capture authentic speech in the so-called 'real world' and make that content available in the classroom. The intent of the first experiment is to increase interest in the target language by introducing technology to enhance interest. In both cases, a Nikon Coolpix camera was used to take pictures and the author put them on one the webpage of the children. The same camera was used to take home videos and they were stored on his iBook G4 computer for later use with the DivX video software. The results of the first experiment demonstrate that not only were interest and recycling opportunities enhanced, but that the children would often use the their ML when talking about the pictures and videos willingly. The experiment to promote exposure to authentic materials did not seek empirical results, but the students who viewed the video clips expressed that listening comprehension was much more difficult than audio materials that accompany texts in general.

1. Introduction

As opposed to parents of monolingual children, the parents of bilingual children face many challenges (Gee, 2006). For example, in the case of the author, his two children are being raised in Japan and attend a public Japanese elementary school. Research shows that young learners benefit from games and activities that allow them to recycle target vocabulary; in particular, in Japan where the consonants / l / & / r /, and / v / & / b / are often difficult to pronounce and cause confusion in understanding certain words and their attendant meanings (Avery, P. & Ehrlich, S., 1992; Ockert, 2006a). There are several ways to overcome this

nagging problem, of course. For example, reading to your children will provide them with the necessary auditory input. Naturally, having your children read aloud provides them with three requirements for second language (L2) development: the necessary orthographic processing required to become a good reader; the required use and development of the muscles of the mouth required to produce the sounds in English not found in Japanese; finally, the opportunity for the parents to monitor the child's ability to correctly pronounce the specific sounds of the L2. In this paper, the children's first language (L1) is Japanese and their minority language (ML) is English, and will be abbreviated accordingly.

2. Young Learners and Bilingualism

Young learners have several advantages for acquiring a second language. For example, because their brains are still growing, their capacity for learning another language is increased. While researchers do not necessarily agree on the exact age to begin learning another language, most agree that the younger they are, the better (Baker, C., 2000; Barron-Hauwaert, S., 2004). Here are ten methods that researchers in the field recommend for raising multilingual children, (Multilingual Children's Association, 2007).

As parents, agree on bilingualism

Most families that have the opportunity to raise a bilingual child can come to a amicable agreement whether to pursue it or not. However, sometimes one parent isn't supportive of speaking the other native language to the child. There can be a fear of being left out, not knowing 'the secret language', or concerns if it's good for your child. In this author's experience, most couples find a way that's acceptable to all persons involved, especially the child.

Know what to expect and when to expect it

Many parents just want to plunge into raising a bilingual child, especially if bilingualism and multilingualism are common in their community. This approach works very well, as it means the parents are comfortable and committed to the concept, and this attitude promotes learning. However, for others, multilingualism can turn the prior communication pattern in the family on its heels, so it pays to be well-prepared. Also, informed parents spot warning signs earlier and know what to do when problems arise such as speech and hearing difficulties, one language lagging behind, or the child's refusal to speak a language. The third being the author's present situation.

How many languages do you want your child to learn?

In general, the number of languages within the household is the number of languages your child will be exposed to. Therefore, most parents who don't speak a foreign language themselves typically don't go beyond bilingualism for their child. On the other hand, when each parent speaks a different foreign language, they may venture for those two, the community language and possibly one more, i.e. four languages.

Beyond four simultaneous languages, the success rate starts to fall significantly. Researchers claim that a child needs to be exposed to a language 30% of their waking time to actively speak it. Regardless of how many languages, you do need regular exposure and creating a need for baby to use them - plus the ability to maintain that for alt least the first five years of the child's life. If you're able to provide that for the languages you want her to learn, go for it.

Decide on a language learning system

Your family should discuss a few issues to make sure everyone is on the same page. Who should speak what language to baby? The two most common and among the most successful language are One Person One Language (OPOL) and Minority Language at Home (ML@H). If you have the opportunity and desire, you could add a language beyond what the family provides through an outside source like an immersion program, a nanny or au pair. This is perhaps the easiest way for parents who don't speak any foreign languages to give early language exposure to their baby. Is there a time specific rule you would like to apply? For example, both parents will speak the minority language during the weekend even though one parent may only be a rudimentary speaker of the language. This is a perfectly legitimate solution, as well. Actually, there are endless variations

Don't wait - Now is the perfect time!

The ideal time to start multilingualism is even before your baby is born. Only recently, with the help of modern technology, have researchers been able to actually see what's going on inside the head of infants. As it turns out, a baby knows important things about language even before birth, and he gains fundamental verbal skills long before he utters his first word. So, why is it a bad idea to wait? It could be said the brain is *primed* the first three years of life with synapses at a peak, busily setting up the optimal neural pathways to mediate language. This construction of the brain's language chip continues, but at an ever-slowing rate until late childhood. Even if you don't start from birth, the earlier is truly easier for both you and your child. By the early teens, a child's early abilities are completely gone. Besides, the younger the child, the less likely they will care about blatant errors. They'll just happily chatter away until your ears are ready to fall off. What better learning conditions can you ask for?

Declare your intentions

Before your baby is born, everyone will have an opinion about the names you're considering for your little one. Once the name is given, most people drop the subject. The same is true of multilingualism. Everyone will no doubt have an opinion before you start, but once you begin, they will just accept it. The best tactic is simply to not ask for support or approval from your friends and extended family. We've found it's better to never open the door for negotiations - simply inform them of your decision. Most opposition you encounter can be politely ignored with a nod or a smile. You might simply say, 'That's interesting' or 'That's a good point.' If it's someone whose opinion you really care about, gently educate them. Well-informed explanations will go a long way. Dispelling common myths on multilingualism and show them the advantages instead, should help you persuade them.

Establish a support network of like-minded persons

It's a good idea to get support from others in a similar situation. Most things are more fun and rewarding if you share them with like-minded people. Not only do you have a peer group to discuss the art of raising bilingual children and benefit from the experiences of others, but you will build a network of other speakers of your minority language. Equally important, it gives your child the opportunity to hear, speak, and interact with other children in the same minority language. This can be an enormous motivator for them. In Matsumoto, the author's hometown, the Dad's of bilingual children regularly gather for breakfast's at Denny's and have even sponsored family get-togethers during the holiday season. The possibilities are as endless as your imagination.

Get relevant materials for your children to use

Having books, music, movies, and toys in your L2 is both fun and useful. There are other household items such as place mats, tableware, posters, etc. that also are helpful. We have English language DVD's and the accompanying picture books produced by ECC here in Japan. They are great and our children love to watch the DVD and read the book together. The Curious George books and The Very Hungry Caterpillar are their favorite books, and the Peanuts Classic Holiday Collection remains a year-round favorite.

Set your goals, but be flexible with them

Unfortunately, there are many things that can undermine your best efforts at helping your child learn a second language. It's certainly not the end of the world if your child gets less exposure to the minority language for a period of time. Your child will remember what he has learned when you're able to increase the language interaction again. Definitely avoid a situation where your child refuses to speak. In this situation, you'll have to be creative and try to find increased exposure to the minority language. You can still bring the language to active use later, and it will be much easier for your child than for someone without the foundation you have already set. That, in itself is a gift beyond measure. No matter what you do, keep your child in contact with the language in some way. In the author's house, he only speaks English no matter what!

Remember to be patient and keep going!

Raising multilingual children does require patience, and there will no doubt be frustrating times. But, of course, parents of monolingual children experience frustration, too! Don't worry if your child doesn't speak his languages as quickly as his friends or with the same proficiency in all of the languages. Reality doesn't always fit our plans. Focus on the success, marvel at what your

child can do, and praise, praise, praise! Remember that if you don't try, you don't accomplish anything. Rest assured that when your child says, 'I want a hug' in your own language, you'll almost cry with pride. At that moment, it won't matter that it took some extra effort or that you had to wait a bit for the result (Multilingual Children's Association, 2007).

4. Motivation

There are several types of motivational theories. However, to delve into them all in detail is beyond the scope of this paper. Certainly, we can all agree that most young people – and especially children - are inherently motivated to be active in almost any situation (Ockert, 2004). Furthermore, they have interests in various learning activities and which types of activities depends on their motivation type (Ockert, 2006b; Ockert, 2005; Ockert, 2004). Also, in the author's opinion, 'research results demonstrate that students are more interested in living the language than merely using it in a classroom setting' (Ockert, 2005: 336; Ockert, 2004). However, regardless of their specific inherent motivation for learning a second language, the author's research has demonstrated that games commonly played in the student's L2 can very easily be adapted for use as an L2 or ML target activity (Ockert, 2006a). For example, Go Fish, UNO or Concentration are all popular activities that children enjoy and have proven successful in many learning situations.

As parents and educators we can take advantage of this natural desire to play games and be active individuals to steer our learners toward activities that they will inherently find motivating (Ockert, 2006b). It was this background that motivated the author to pursue the use of technology as a means to enhance interest in his children's ML. The children were definitely

interested in both the use of photos on a web-page and especially the use of video to express themselves in their ML.

5. What Can We Do as Parents and Teachers?

Parents have several roles, and a language educator is definitely one of them; however, parents who wish to raise bilingual or multilingual children face many obstacles but also have the opportunity to reap the special reward of watching their children develop in a special way. (Harding-Esch and Riley, 2003).

According to Sugimori (2006), the maintenance of language minority children's L1 is often a desired outcome, but previous research has illustrated the difficulties of maintaining this language and shown that bilingual children are unfortunately susceptible to incomplete L1 acquisition. Therefore, what can parents do to maximize exposure to the ML while also avoiding the possibility of a decrease in the child's linguistic ability in their L1. The author and his wife decided that reading together was one method.

Reading Together

What can we do to offset the potential for negative consequences mentioned above? As stated previously, the author's children enjoy reading together. In reading, scaffolding is the assistance that we as parents can provide through verbal interaction. The term *scaffolding* was introduced by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) describing the assistance that a tutor can provide to a tutee during a task involvement. Scaffolded help is characterized by the following six features: 1) encouraging interest in the task, 2) simplifying the task, 3) maintaining pursuit of the goal, 4) accentuating critical features of the reading task to reiterate the discrepancy between what the child has produced and what he should have produced, 5) reducing

frustration during reading, and 6) being a good role-model of the reading task (Tanaka, 2005:23). In the author's house, both he and his wife read to their children using this approach. However, to avoid incomplete development in both languages, the author reads to his children in English and his wife reads to the children in Japanese. Please note that the children request that both parents read to them regardless of the language. IE, the author receives just as many requests to read Curious George in English as his wife does for books in Japanese.

Since reading is definitely story telling, and a story need not always use a book (Ockert, 2007b), the author began looking for ways to encourage his children to express themselves in their ML (English) in other ways. Story telling seemed an obvious solution. Furthermore, since both children are young learners who enjoy being active like most young people, it was decided that video was the perfect means to allow them to be active while using and learning the language (Ockert, 2007c).

6. Why Use Technology?

The author asked himself, 'How can I maintain my children's interest in English as they grow older?' In Japan, video games and the like are ubiquitous. In the author's opinion, most of the video games on the market offer little or no educational opportunity – least of all in a second and/or foreign language. However, research by Tanaka (2005) has confirmed the link between technology and task work, in this case speaking English. With this in mind, the author brainstormed various ideas before his daughter provided the answer: she wanted her own webpage (Ockert, 2007a). This would provide us with an opportunity to communicate in English. First, we spent time deciding which pictures to put on her homepage. Second, we proceeded to talk about what would be good choices of places and events to take picture for

her homepage. Finally, and most important, we can now to go her homepage and view her photos and spend time together talking about them in her ML and even stringing the pictures together in story telling style. This has proven to be an effective way to maintain student interest in target language use (Ockert, 2007b), since story telling remains a popular method to teach second language comprehension while maintaining student interest (Ockert, 2007c).

Furthermore, recently several digital cameras come equipped with a movie mode with sound feature (Nikon Digital Website, 2007). This would allow us to record our own movies in English. On several occasions, the author decided to take videos of his children while he asked them questions in their ML. This proved particularly effective to review their English lessons target vocabulary and grammar. In addition, with the use of a free video software known as DivX, the author could save the videos to the iBook and review them on occasion. The great news is that nowadays, both the Coolpix and DivX technologies are readily available for anyone interested in using them (Ockert, 2007a). While the Nikon Coolpix may be a bit expensive, DivX is not. In fact, DivX can be downloaded for free from their website located at www.divx.com.

7. Conclusion

Parents who are raising bilingual children face many challenges, not the least of which is keeping their children interested in the target language. There are several reasons why they may lose interest in learning another language: time pressure; the fact that their friends do not use the language; boredom; and other interests, to name a few. However, the use of recent technological advances such as the internet and web-pages, digital cameras, and finally movie mode with sound cameras provide an interesting alternative to traditional educational approaches. The use of technology can capture and hold a child's interest in a positive and

active manner as opposed to passive game playing. In the examples outlined above, the author's children used their own pictures on their web-pages as a source of English language conversation material. In addition, they made their own English language videos. Both proved successful motivators for them to communicate with the author in their ML, English.

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