

Application of Audiovisual Input into L2 Vocabulary Acquisition

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Abstract: This essay investigates the integration of audiovisual input, particularly TV series, into the acquisition of second language (L2) vocabulary acquisition. Drawing on Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input in language learning, the essay reviews three empirical studies that explore the effectiveness of audiovisual materials in vocabulary learning and the study finds that audiovisual materials can facilitate vocabulary acquisition incidentally, with factors like the frequency of occurrence and cognitive relatedness playing significant roles. Additionally, the use of on-screen imagery and captions can further enhance learning outcomes, especially for intermediate learners. The paper then proposes a teaching section that integrates TV series into the curriculum, encouraging students to engage with authentic language materials and promoting incidental learning through repeated exposure. The proposed approach aims to enhance the overall learning experience and improve vocabulary acquisition for learners of English as a Foreign Language.

1. Introduction

Recent years have witnessed an academic interest in the exposure to foreign language input in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). While the written input is the most widely investigated in this area (Peters, 2019)^[7], the research into audiovisual input is recently attracting critical attention, and a number of studies have suggested its effectiveness in EFL learning and teaching. Therefore, this essay aims to examine how to integrate audiovisual input of TV series into EFL teaching in practice to support learners' L2 vocabulary development by reviewing three current empirical research by Peters and Webb (2018)^[8], Peters (2019)^[7] and Pujadas and Muñoz (2019)^{[7][8][9]}. The essay starts with introducing the leading theory associated with the topic, that is, the Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1985)^[4], and reviewing three empirical studies, followed by their pedagogical implications and purposed application.

2. Theory associated with the topic

The essay is theoretically and fundamentally based on the Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1985)^[4], which has an influential contribution to the field of SLA for emphasizing the importance of comprehensible input.

Input refers to the target language that ‘a learner is exposed to in a communicative context (Gass & Mackey, 2014, p.181)’^[2], such as reading, listening or sign language. Input can come from various sources such as teachers, classmates, media or the environment around learners. According to the Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1985)^[4], sufficient comprehensible input is fundamental to developing learners’ language competence because it facilitates the natural development of fluency in learners’ speaking or writing abilities.

Krashen’s (1985) Input Hypothesis consists of five interlocking hypotheses: *acquisition/learning*, *monitor*, *natural order*, *input* and *affective filter*^[4]. The *acquisition/learning* hypothesis differs language acquisition from language learning and states that language is acquired through an unconscious process of being exposed to comprehensible input. The *monitor* hypothesis argues that learning language consciously, such as studying grammar rules, can only help learners monitor their language output and measure language ability but does not help to improve it. The *natural order* hypothesis states that language acquisition happens in a natural order for everyone, and the *affective filter* hypothesis states that affective factors can influence language acquisition. For example, the feelings of embarrassment might hinder learners’ process of acquiring a language. The *input* hypothesis claims that learners acquire a language when exposed to the target language input that is slightly more advanced than their current level, which Krashen (1985) calls ‘i+1’^[4].

Despite the criticism, there is significant evidence that exposure to substantial comprehensible input can lead to greater linguistic competence. Hafiz and Tudor’s (1989) research, for example, suggests that extensive L2 reading input contributes to learners’ improvement of language skills^[3]. Additionally, specific language teaching approaches, such as Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach, which are dependent on comprehensible input, are generally acknowledged as useful in the language classroom.

Drawing on Krashen’s (1985) Input Hypothesis^[4], Nation (2007) has proposed five characteristics of desirable input: it is familiar to the learners; it is interesting and engaging; it is easy to understand with only a small proportion of unknown language features; it provides context clues and background knowledge; it is produced in substantial quantities^[5]. Watching TV series and movies is a typical activity that provides these suitable inputs (Nation, 2007)^[5].

3. Three empirical studies

There is an increasing number of studies that have been conducted to explore the effect of audiovisual input (e.g. Rodgers, 2018; Webb, 2015)^{[10][13]}. For this essay, three articles that have implications for EFL learning and teaching have been selected for discussion.

Study 1: Incidental vocabulary acquisition through viewing L2 television and factors that affect learning (Peters & Webb, 2018)

Peters and Webb (2018) have carried out two experiments with Dutch-speaking EFL learners, aiming to explore the potentials of incidental vocabulary acquisition through viewing a full-length L2 television, and to examine the role of variables (frequency of occurrence, cognateness, relevance, and learners’ prior vocabulary knowledge) that might contribute to the learning^[8].

First of all, Peters and Webb’s (2018) findings from a questionnaire indicate positive attitudes towards the audiovisual materials by the participants, who find the TV program informative, engaging and difficulty-appropriate^[8]. Secondly, the findings suggest that incidental vocabulary acquisition occurs through watching L2 television. To be more specific, viewing TV in the target language positively results in substantial vocabulary gains in terms of meaning recall and meaning recognition.

In addition, the research also addresses the relationship between vocabulary learning and the role of four variables (frequency of occurrence, cognateness, relevance, and learners’ prior vocabulary

knowledge). Firstly, the study has found a positive correlation between L2 vocabulary learning and frequency of occurrence. The repeated encounters with new words in L2 TV viewing are found to facilitate lexical development, with slightly larger influence on meaning recall. Secondly, cognateness, which is defined as the ‘words that are formally and semantically related (Peters & Webb, 2018, pp.555)’ in two languages, is considered to have the largest effect. It might be contributed by the factor that the participants’ L1, Dutch and the target language, English, have remarkable linguistic similarity and share a large number of cognates^[8]. Thirdly, the findings suggest that learners who have more vocabulary knowledge tend to be more successful in incidental vocabulary learning through TV viewing. On the other hand, no critical evidence suggests relevance contribute to the learning.

Study 2: The effect of imagery and on-screen text on foreign language vocabulary learning from audiovisual input (Peters, 2019)

As a positive correlation between L2 vocabulary acquisition and the audiovisual materials is found, the second study by Peters (2019) is conducted to investigate further if imagery and the addition of on-screen text in the form of subtitles (L1) and captions (L2) has potential benefits for this multimodal input^[7]. Therefore, Peters (2019) has carried out a study with Dutch-speaking EFL learners of a secondary school with intermediate English proficiency in three TV viewing situations: with L1 subtitles, with L2 captions and without subtitles or captions^[7].

The findings demonstrate that the on-screen imagery is contributive to vocabulary acquisition from audiovisual input. Learners are three times more likely to incidentally pick up words with imagery than without it. These results are consistent with the findings from the research by Rodgers (2018), who claims that the existence of visual support in the audiovisual input facilitates vocabulary learning in a potentially more effective way than spoken input, that is, listening^[10]. Additionally, Peters’s (2019) have found that even though learning occurs in all three contexts, L2 captions play a more beneficial role in vocabulary gain compared to L1 subtitles and no on-screen text^[7]. However, Peters (2019) also acknowledge that L2 captions might be more helpful for language learners with intermediate and advanced level and L1 subtitles are better suited for beginners (Danan, 2004), which might explain the reason why Peters’s (2019) intermediate-level participants achieve more noticeable progress with L2 captions^{[1][7]}.

Study 3: Extensive viewing of captioned and subtitled TV series: a study of L2 vocabulary learning by adolescents (Pujadas & Muñoz, 2019)

By conducting longitudinal research with 106 adolescent learners in the secondary school classrooms, Pujadas and Muñoz (2019) aim to answer the following research questions^[9]:

1) To what extent can L2 learners acquire vocabulary form and meaning through extensive television viewing in the target language?

2) How is L2 vocabulary acquisition by L2 television viewing influenced by the language of the on-screen text (L1 or L2), instruction (focused or non-focused) and learner proficiency?

In terms of the first research question, results show that the extensive exposure to audiovisual input does support L2 vocabulary acquisition, which confirms the findings from Peters and Webb’s (2018) research and the majority of research in this field (e.g. Rodgers, 2018; Webb, 2015)^{[8][10][13]}. In addition, the results suggest that learners achieve greater gains in form recognition compared to meaning recognition in all four conditions, that is, with either L1 subtitles or L2 captions and with or without pre-teaching vocabulary instructions.

The findings concerning the second research question show that the learners who have received focused instruction of pre-teaching vocabulary significantly outperform their non-focused counterparts in both form and meaning recognition. Furthermore, the effects of L1 subtitles and L2 captions do not notably differ. Finally, the essential role of learner proficiency is underscored, with more advanced proficiency related to higher vocabulary gains, which indicates a similar result to

Peters and Webb's (2018) findings^[8].

4. Proposed applications into future classroom teaching

4.1 Implications from the studies

Peters and Webb's (2018) research has suggested that the extensive viewing of L2 television is beneficial to optimizing L2 vocabulary learning and the repeated encounters with new words, the linguistic similarity between L1 and L2 and learners' vocabulary knowledge are key factors that should be taken into considerations^[8].

Peters's (2019) research further confirms that the role of on-screen imagery is helpful for L2 vocabulary learning at the level of both form recognition and meaning recall, and while lexical developments occur in three TV viewing contexts, L2 captions are more helpful for language learners with intermediate level^[7].

It is worth pointing out that the participants in both Peters and Webb's (2018) and Peters's (2019) studies did not receive any pre-teaching instruction but still succeeded in enlarging vocabulary knowledge, which is consistent with Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis that comprehensible inputs are essential for language development and supports the potential values of L2 TV viewing outside of the language classroom, with on-screen text support of L1 subtitles or L2 captions^{[4][7][8]}.

Pujadas and Muñoz's (2019) research, on the other hand, not only confirms the effectiveness of audiovisual input from L2 TV in incidental vocabulary learning but also proves the potentials of incorporating explicit instructions into TV viewing. A small amount of time investment in pre-teaching and directing learners' attention to the target linguistic items can lead to substantial development in L2 vocabulary (Pujadas & Muñoz, 2019)^[9].

In conclusion, these three studies have not only confirmed the practicality of L2 TV viewing in teaching vocabulary but also indicated that learners' proficiency, word repetition, on-screen text and teacher instructions play a facilitative role in optimizing the potentials of learning vocabulary through audiovisual input (Peters, 2019; Peters & Webb, 2018; Pujadas & Muñoz, 2019)^{[7][8][9]}.

4.2 My purposed applications into future teaching

Based on the pedagogical implications from these three empirical studies, a section of adopting the English TV series in a senior high school teaching context can be illustrated as my purposed application into my future classroom teaching.

Firstly, the teacher carefully selects the audiovisual materials appropriate for learners' age and language proficiency, that is, *Fresh off the Boat*, an American sitcom television series about the life of a Chinese-American family in Florida in the 1990s, and introduce the background of this series. Then the class watches a captioned clip of 5 minutes and teacher leads a class discussion to check learners' understanding. After that, the teacher provides a list of target vocabulary and asks learners to pay attention to it while watching the clip for the second time. Finally, after the class watches the clips again, the teacher leads the students to talk through the meaning of the target vocabulary and how they are used in the TV series and asks them to finish the rest of the episode after school.

There are a number of advantages from this practice. Firstly, L2 vocabulary acquisition is a foundational element in foreign language teaching. However, the time devoted to vocabulary teaching and learning is limited in the language classroom. Therefore, language learners can advance their vocabulary acquisition by L2 television viewing because it provides extensive exposure of authentic L2 input to fill the need, particularly in the EFL learning context where the exposure to authentic input is limited (Webb, 2015)^[13].

Cognitively speaking, in TV viewing, there are repeated encounters with vocabulary that are not

commonly used (Rodgers, 2018; Webb & Rodgers, 2009)^{[10][14]}, and these repeated occurrences can provide opportunities for familiarity and memory strengthening (Wang, 2012)^[12] and thus are beneficial for vocabulary intake (Peters & Webb, 2018)^[8]. Furthermore, the combination of visual and audio support allows learners to have access to various sections of the brain, and thus process information in greater depth (Oxford & Crookall, 1990)^[6]; therefore, learning is better facilitated when learners have access to both aural information and visual images (Peters, 2019)^[7]. Finally, the addition of on-screen texts might be even more effective for vocabulary gains in audiovisual input as they draw learners' attention to unfamiliar linguistic items, encourage noticing and learning through repeated encounters and ease the burden of working memories (Vanderplank, 2016)^[11].

In terms of the social aspects of language learning, incorporating L2 TV series into language classrooms enhances learners' motivation and boosts their attention (Peters & Webb, 2018; Pujadas & Muñoz, 2019)^{[8][9]}, especially learners' integrative orientations towards learning a language. English TV series are conducted for native English speakers, which means they contain a large number of natural and genuine language use and real-life everyday conversations. Therefore, learners will have a more lively experience of using L2 through the cultural and social messages embedded in the TV series and gain a deeper understanding of the cultural phenomenon connected to the target language (Wang, 2012)^[12].

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the empirical studies by Peters and Webb (2018), Peters (2019), Pujadas and Muñoz (2019) have provided practical implications for language teaching and learning that in addition to the comprehensible L2 inputs from the teacher and classmates in the language classroom, TV series can be considered as an important source of authentic L2 exposure and a valuable tool for vocabulary acquisition in and outside of the classroom^{[7][8][9]}. Pedagogically, teachers are expected to carefully select appropriate, engaging and comprehensible subtitled and/or captioned audiovisual materials and provide scaffolding to support learners' understanding and learning in language classrooms, such as pre-teaching the target linguistic items, as well as encouraging additional out-of-class exposure to L2 audiovisual input.

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