EXPOSURE TO AUTHENTIC AUDIOVISUAL PROGRAMS IN INFORMAL SETTING AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Taher BAHRANI
Islamic Azad University, Department of English, Mahshahr Branch, Mahshahr, Iran
taherbahrani@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT
Today, various audio-visual technologies are developing by sharing and showing a variety of programs to both instruct and entertain different audience. These developments offer many possibilities for teachers to utilize different programs as various sources of authentic language input to construct activities for enhancing language learning. In the same line, the present paper aimed at providing empirical evidence on the effect of exposure to various audio-visual programs on language proficiency of differentiated language proficiency levels language learners in informal setting. To this end, 75 language learners majoring in TESL were assigned to 3 language proficiency levels based on the scores obtained by them from an IELTS pre-test: low (N=25), intermediate (N=25), and upper-intermediate (N=25) levels. During the study all the participants were asked to have exposure to their preferred audio-visual program(s) in informal setting and keep track of the amount and type of exposure. At the end of the study, another IELTS test was administered to all the participants to find out which language proficiency level(s) language learners could improve their language proficiency more. The results of the post-test were indicative of the fact that intermediate and upper-intermediate language learners improved their language proficiency more. The data obtained from the self-report sheets also showed that the intermediate and upper-intermediate participants had more exposure to news than other programs.

Key words: Mass media, Authentic, Language input, Language proficiency

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the problems that language learners in English as a foreign language (EFL) context face is the lack of social interaction in English which is generally understood to boost language learning through providing the necessary language input for language learning out-side the classroom setting. In some cases even teachers as the available source of language input in formal setting, lack the sufficient knowledge in second language. According to Stander (2006 in Nel&Müller,2010), when teachers' second language knowledge is not on an acceptable standard for the use of English, their poor usage and knowledge of the language are transferred to the learners. Considering this issue, various technologies are available in both EFL/ESL contexts that can provide quick access to language input through different authentic materials which may not have been initially produced for language learning purpose.

In the last few years, various audio-visual technologies have dominated the world by massive developments in providing many possibilities for teachers to construct activities for language learners around having exposure to different audio-visual mass media programs, watching related videos, and holding conversations in real-time in formal as well as in informal language learning setting (Chinnery,2005; Bell,2003; Ishihara& Chi,2004). Accordingly, language learners can have access to various authentic language input through different technologies such as Computer, TV, and CD player for language learning in informal setting.

The notion of informal language learning is considered as the lifelong process of learning by which every individual acquires and accumulates the required knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from exposure to the environment at home or at work (Rogers,2004). This sort of unconscious learning mainly occurs through reading newspapers and books or by listening to the radio or viewing films or other programs (Coombs and Ahmed,1974). However, the important issue in this regard is that the materials to provide the necessary language input in informal setting should be authentic.

In relation to the concept of authenticity, there are various definitions of this concept as it relates to language classroom. In this regard, Gilmore (2007) considered authentic language input as the language conveying a real message which is produced by a real speaker or writer. In a nutshell, authentic language input refers to the use of authentic materials from the target culture which is presented in the target language. These materials can be accessed through various audio-visual mass media programs different, for example, news, movies, songs, soap opera, and comedy. In the same line, the present research aims at shedding more light on the studies which highlight the use of different audio-visual programs as authentic language input. More specifically, the present research will provide empirical evidence in relation to the best type of audio-visual mass media program which leads to the improvement of the language proficiency of differentiated language proficiency levels language learners.

2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

The integration of different audio-visual programs such as news, films, comedy, cartoons, and songs as sources of authentic language input into language learning have been the focus of many studies. Accordingly, some of them are reviewed to highlight both their findings and their drawbacks to be filled by the present research.

In the same line, exposure to audio-visual news, the pedagogical value of news, and the possibility of using audio-visual news at all levels of EFL/ESL settings in order to enhance different language skills have been the focus of so many studies (Brinton and Gaskill,1978; Poon, 1992; Baker, 1996; Cauldwell, 1996; Berber, 1997; Cabaj and Nicolic,2000).The effectiveness of listening to TV and radio news on improving EFL students' listening comprehension was studied by Brinton and Gaskill (1978). The research was conducted in Germany where videotaped news broadcasts from TV as a source of authentic language input were used in advance level EFL classes once a week for approximately six months to find out whether or not any improvements would be achieved on listening comprehension.

Regarding EFL students' difficulties comprehending fast speech, Brinton and Gaskill (1978) highlighted that the origin of this problem is traced back in insufficient exposure to TV and radio news programs. Classroom materials which are used to enhance listening comprehension are not sufficient enough to help the language learners cope with rapid speech comprehension (Brinton and Gaskill, 1978). Based on the results obtained from the study, TV and radio news improved the listening skill. This was because different newscasts could bring reality into the classroom and enable the students to focus more on substantive issues. Besides, because of the recycling feature of vocabulary in different TV and radio news, EFL/ESL language learners could become more familiar with many contextualized vocabulary items during a long period. Without providing empirical evidence, Brinton and Gaskill (1978) claimed that by listening to TV and radio news, improvements in the target language go beyond listening comprehension.

Similar studies on using TV news to improve listening proficiency were also conducted by other scholars (Poon, 1992; Baker,1996; Cauldwell,1996; Berber,1997; Cabaj & Nicolic,2000).

Regarding the use of various kinds of films as pedagogically valuable authentic materials in EFL/ESL classrooms, a number of studies have been carried out (Chapple and Crutis,2000; Ryan, 1998; Heffernan, 2005; Gebhardt, 2004). The use of different films in content-based instruction approaches in EFL classrooms in Southeast Asia was the focus of a study conducted by Chapple and Crutis (2000). The study emphasized how intrinsically motivating materials such as films along with content-based instruction can enhance language learning. Similar studies were also conducted by Ryan (1998), Heffernan (2005), and Gebhardt (2004) focusing on enhancing motivation and language learning through the use of films in language classrooms without providing empirical evidence.

A review of the related literature in the area of the incorporation of various songs in language teaching provides limited empirical evidence. In this regard, some researchers (Aida, 1994; Trapp, 1991; Schoepp,2001) have proposed songs in the foreign language classroom to lower anxiety and increase motivation, provide physiological benefits, guide lesson planning and practical classroom, and enhance cultural awareness and sensitivity. In the same line, the pedagogical values of English songs as authentic language input in EFL/ESL contexts was the focus of a study conducted by Schoepp (2001). According to Schoepp (2001), affective reasons, cognitive reasons, and linguistic reasons are three important factors that make songs pedagogically effective authentic language materials for the enhancement of language learning.

Cartoons as authentic language materials have also been the focus of limited number of studies (Clark, 2000; Rule & Ague, 2005). According to Clark (2000), cartoons can engage the attention of the learners and present information in a non-threatening atmosphere. In the same line, Rule and Ague (2005) conducted a study providing evidence of the students' preferences to use cartoons in language learning. Accordingly, cartoons, similar to songs, are preferred because they create a high degree of motivation to recognize and produce humor for the students, they enhance the memory, and they make connection between the new materials and the prior knowledge through analogy. Regarding other audio-visual programs such as Talk show, Game show, Documentary, and Sport, it should be mentioned that no related study could be found to be reviewed. Nevertheless, the researcher includes them in the present research because they may prove to be effective in improving the language proficiency of differentiated language proficiency levels language learners. This may be considered as a new horizon in focusing on many different programs.

In short, the majority of the aforementioned descriptive and experimental works have been conducted on the pedagogical value and the effect of exposure to different programs on promoting different language skills particularly listening comprehension but none of them has specifically focused on the discovering effect of exposure to various types and amount of audio-visual programs on improving the language proficiency of different proficiency levels language learners. This was one of the initial reasons to carry out the present study.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Basically, the research tried to provide empirical evidence to the following questions:
1. To what extent, greater exposure to authentic audio-visual mass media programs improves low level language learners' language proficiency?
2. To what extent, greater exposure to authentic audio-visual mass media programs improves intermediate level language learners' language proficiency?
3. To what extent, greater exposure to authentic audio-visual mass media programs improves upper-intermediate level language learners' language proficiency?

4.   What type of audio-visual mass media improves the language proficiency of each differentiated proficiency levels language learners more?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. PARTICIPANTS
Initially, 135 language learners aged from 22 to 27 majoring in TESL including both males and females went through the research voluntarily. Then, a smaller population of 75 participants was selected out of the initial two hundred participants based on a sample IELTS pre-test. These 75 participants were divided into three differentiated language proficiency levels based on the scores which they obtained in the pre-test: low level (N=25), intermediate level (N=25), and upper-intermediate level (N=25).

4.2. INSTRUMENTS
The two instruments that were utilized in order to accumulate the necessary data for the present research were a set of two parallel IELTS language proficiency tests and a self-report sheet. The two sample IELTS language proficiency tests were utilized as pre-post-tests. In the same line and to obtain quantitative data on the type and the amount of each participant's preferred exposure to various authentic audio-visual programs, a self-report sheet was prepared and given to the 75 selected participants after the pre-test. The self-report sheet comprised a list of 10 different types of audio-visual mass media programs.

4.3. PROCEDURE
The first step was to select the participants to carry out the research. To do so, one of the parallel IELTS language proficiency tests was given to a population of 135 language learners including both males and females majoring in TESL to select 75 participants initially. The selection criteria were based on the following IELTS band score categories:
- 25 participants who obtain 4 or 4.5 in the overall band score were selected as low level.
- 25 participants who obtain 5 or 5.5 in the overall band score were selected as intermediate level.
- 25 participants who obtain 6 or 6.5 in the overall band score were selected as upper intermediate.

After the selection of the participants the actual data collection started. The initial data necessary for the present study was obtained from the two parallel IELTS pre-post tests. Accordingly, the scores obtained by the 75 participants from the administration of one of the IELTS language proficiency tests were compared with the scores obtained by them from the administration of the other IELTS language proficiency tests at the end of the research. This was done to answer RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3.

Another source of data was the self-report sheet which aimed at providing information about the type and amount of exposure to audio-visual mass media programs that each participant in each group of differentiated language proficiency level had during the research period.
The duration of the research was one month. Throughout the research, the researcher asked all the three groups of participants to have exposure to any types of audio-visual programs out-side the classroom and keep a diary of the amount (how many hours exposure) and the type of the program(s) they watch, for example, news, films, songs, documentary or cartoons. At the end of the study, the data obtained from the self-report sheets of the three groups were analyzed separately to answer RQ4.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the administration of the post-tests to all the participants in the 3 groups of differentiated language proficiency levels, the data was analyzed using SPSS.17 statistical analysis software.
In relation to scores obtained from the pre-post tests by the participants in the low level group, there was a minor increase in the mean score in the post-test. However, in order to find out whether this minor increase in the mean is significant or not, a statistical analysis of t-test was run. The result of the t-test showed that the t-observed was smaller than the t-critical which was indicative of the fact that the increase in the mean score was not significant (table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics related to low level participants IELTS pretest and posttest results
T-observed=-0.250   T-critical=1.671   T-observed smaller than t-critical

Regarding the scores obtained from the pre-post tests by the participants in the intermediate level group, the change in the mean score in the post-test was bigger compared with that of the low level group. However, a statistical analysis of t-test was also run in order to find out the significance of this increase. The result of the t-test showed that the t-observed was bigger than the t-critical which was indicative of the fact that the increase in the mean score was significant

Low level	N	MEAN	SD	t-test
Pretest	25	4.09	.53	_0.250
Posttest	25	4.28	.46	

(table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics related to intermediate level participants IELTS pretest and posttest results

Intermediate level	N	MEAN	SD	t-test
Pretest	25	5.53	.50	_3.203
Posttest	25	6.25	.46	

T-observed=-3.203   T-critical=1.671   T-observed bigger than t-critical

Lastly, there was an increase in the mean score of the post-test of the upper-intermediate level. However, the significance of this increase should also be verified through a t-test. The result of the t-test showed that the t-observed was bigger than the t-critical which was indicative of the fact that this increase in the mean score was also significant (table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics related to upper-intermediate level participants IELTS pretest and posttest results

Upper-intermediate level	N	MEAN	SD	t-test
Pretest	25	6.05	.53	_3.453
Posttest	25	6.85	.51	

T-observed=-3.453   T-critical=1.671   T-observed bigger than t-critical

After analyzing the results obtained from the administration of the pre-post by each differentiated language proficiency level, the research questions are discussed in relation to the results of the research.

In relation to the first research question about the low level language learners, it should be mentioned that this group of language learners could not improve their language proficiency to a significant extent through exposure to various types of audio-visual mass media programs. The reason behind this insignificant improvement may be traced back in the self-report sheets of the low level language proficiency participants to answer research question four. According to the data obtained from the self-report sheets, the low level language proficiency participants had exposure to various cartoons more than other types of programs during the period of the study in informal setting (10038 minutes).

Regarding the second and the third research questions, it can be drawn from the results related to the intermediate and upper-intermediate levels that these two differentiated language proficiency levels language learners could improve their language proficiency to a significant extent through exposure to various audio-visual mass media programs during the period of the study. By referring to the data obtained from the self-report sheets of these two groups related to the type and amount of exposure to audio-visual mass media programs, the reason behind this significant improvement may be due to their great amount of exposure to news (intermediate=9685 & upper-intermediate=12245 minutes).

This improvement made through exposure to news as an authentic source of language input is in line with the studies conducted by Brinton and Gaskill (1978), Cauldwell (1996), and Mackenzie (1997) regarding the effect of exposure to news on improving different language skills. Accordingly, the present study proved that greater exposure to news can improve the language proficiency of intermediate and upper-intermediate levels language learners to a significant extent.

The reason behind this might be that there are some characteristics observed in developing any type of audio-visual mass media news which may lead to language proficiency development. In this regard, one of the characteristics of audio-visual mass media news which make it pedagogically valuable authentic source of language input for second language acquisition is vocabulary recycling (Brinton and Gaskill,1978). The recycling feature of vocabulary in audio-visual mass media news genre is also considered as redundancy of input which is understood by the language learners to help their comprehension (Chaudron,1983; Chiang& Dunkel,1992). In the same line, news writers and very experienced news reporters or newscasters are aware of the role of the news genre in the public attitude. As a result, they make their attempts to present the news stories, discussions, and commentaries as precisely and directly as possible to draw individuals' attention. To do this, specific vocabulary items and structure are used in news stories in order to make the news more understandable with a large group of the public. In other words, ambiguous structures which may hinder comprehension are avoided as much as possible in developing and presenting audio-visual mass media news items. The lexico-syntactic feature is what makes audio-visual mass media news a valuable source of vocabulary input for EFL/ESL language learners. Because the news often includes the same jargon and utterances, a good pedagogical benefit implicitly exists in various audio-visual mass media news programs (Blatchford,1973).

Another essential characteristic of news from audio-visual mass media is the fluency of speech which is considered as the use of appropriate pausing, rhythm, intonation, stress, and rate of speaking (Bell, 2003). Chambers (1997) considered fluency as a component of oral proficiency which is acquired and emerges naturally. Accordingly, fluency of speech is a marked linguistic feature which can be observed in utterances designed and developed for audio-visual mass media news stories to be read by newscasters.

Moreover, one more important feature of audio-visual mass media news is the special discourse which is used throughout the issue. In this regard, essential factors such as the nature of the news, the cognitive, affective and social status of both the news items and the audience, the structure of the news, etc. should be of focus. Therefore, while listening to a piece of news, "Understanding is not merely associating meanings to words, sentences or discourses, but constructing mental models in episodic memory, including our own opinions and emotions associated with an event we hear or read about." (Van Dijk,1991:367).

In relation to the limitation of the study and its findings, it should be mentioned that the participants of the present research were not advance level language learners. However, further studies can be conducted with advance level language learners to find out the effectiveness of having exposure to various audio-visual programs on their language proficiency.

6. CONCLUSION

Although a lot has been written on the role and importance of input in second language acquisition, limited studies have provided empirical data on the source and the type of language input. In the view of that and with the impressive developments in technology and easy accessibility of different audio-visual mass media programs which can provide authentic language input, the present paper aimed at further investigating the clinical implication of exposure to various audio-visual mass media programs on boosting the language proficiency of differentiated language proficiency language learners.

Accordingly, it was found out that greater exposure to audio-visual mass media news as intermediate and upper-intermediate language learners' preferred source of language input in informal setting can lead to language proficiency improvement to a significant extent. In contrast, greater exposure to cartoons as the low level language learners' preferred source of language input in informal setting could not lead to a significant improvement. However, low level language learners may improve their language proficiency in informal setting through greater exposure to audio-visual mass media news.

REFERENCES

Aida, Y.(1994). Examination of Horowitz, Horowitz, & Cope's construct of foreign language anxiety: The case of students in Japanese. Modern Language Journal, 78: 155-168.

Baker, N.(1996). Using the TV news in the EFL classroom. Zielsprache, 26(2): 30-33.

Blatchford, C.(1973).Newspapers: vehicles for teaching ESOL with cultural focus. TESOL Quarterly, 7: 145-153.

Brinton, D., & Gaskill, W.(1987). Using news broadcasts in the ESL/EFL classroom. TESOL Quarterly, 12(4): 403-413.

Berber, S. A.(1997). Proficiency and comprehension of television news in a foreign language. Revista de Documentacao de Estudos em Linguistica Teorica e Aplicada (D.E.L.T.A.), 13(2): 177-190.

Cauldwell, R. T.(1996).Direct encounters with fast speech on CD-Audio to teach listening. System, 24(4): 521-528.

Chambers, F.(1997). What do we mean by fluency? System, 25(4): 535-544.

Chapple. L., & Curtis. A.(2000). Content based instruction in Hong Kong: Students responses to films. System, 28: 419-433.

Chaudron, C.(1983).Simplification of input: Topic and reinstatements and their effects on Llearners' recognition and recall. TESOL Quarterly, 17(3): 437-458.

Chiang, C.S.,& Dunkel, P.(1992).The effect of speech modification, prior knowledge and listening proficiency on EFL lecture learning. TESOL Quarterly, 26(2): 345-74.

Chinnery, G. M.(2005). Speaking and listening online: A survey of internet resources. English Teaching Forum, 43(3): 10-17. http://exchanges.state.gov/forum/vols/vol43/no3/p10.htm, Accessed July 2007.

Clark, C.(2000).Innovative strategy: Concept cartoons. Instructional and learning strategies, 12: 34-45.

Coombs, P. H., & Ahmed, M.(1974).Attacking rural poverty: How non-formal education can help. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

Gebhard, J. G. (1996).Teaching English as a Foreign Language: A Teacher Self-Development and Methodology Guide. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Gilmore, A.(2007).Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning. Lang. Teach. 40: 97-118.

Heffernan, N.(2005). Watching movie trailers in the ESL class. The internet TEFL journal, 9(3). Available at: http://iTEFLj.org/Lessons/Heffernan_movie_trailers.html. Retrieved February 23, 2006.

Ishihara, N., & Chi, J. C. (2004). Authentic video in the beginning ESOL classroom: Using a full-length feature film for listening and speaking strategy practice. English Teaching Forum, 42(1): 30-35. http://exchanges.state.gov/forum/vols/vol42/no1/p30.htm. Accessed May 13, 2007.

Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N.(2001).How Languages are Learned, Second edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Marsick, V. J., & Watkins, K.(1990).Informal and Incidental Learning in the Workplace. London and New York: Routledge.

Nel, N., & Müller, H.(2010). The impact of teachers' limited English proficiency on English second language learners in South African schools. South African Journal of Education, 30:635-650.

Nunan, D.(1999).Second Language Teaching and Learning. Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Pemberton, L., & Fallahkhair, S., & Masthoff, G.(2004).Toward a theoretical framework for informal language learning via interactive television. CELDA Journal. 2004.

Poon, A.(1992).Action research: A study on using TV news to improve listening proficiency. Research Report, 14: 1-70.

Porter, D.,& Roberts, J.(1981).Authentic listening activities. English Language Teaching Journal, 36(1): 37-47.

Rogers, A.(2004).Looking again at non-formal and informal education - towards a new paradigm, the encyclopedia of informal education, www.infed.org/biblio/non_formal_paradigm.htm. Last updated: June 04, 2004.

Rubin, J.(1994).A Review of Second Language Listening Comprehension Research. Modern Language Journal, 78(2): 199-221.

Rule, A. C., & Auge, J.(2005).Using humorous cartoons to teach mineral and rock concepts in sixth grade science class. Journal of geosciences education, 53(3): 548-558.

Ryan, S.(1998).Using films to develop learner motivation. The internet TEFL journal, 13 (11). Available at: http://iTEFLj.org/articles/Rayan-Film.html. Accessed: February 3, 2006.

Schoepp, K.(2001).Reasons for using songs in EFL/ESL classrooms. The internet TEFL Journal, 7(2). Available at: http://iTEFLj.org/articles/Schoepp-Songs.html. Accessed: February 3, 2006.

Trapp, E. A.(1991).Break down inhibitions and build up understanding with music, music, music. Hispania, 74: 437-438.

Van Djjk, T. A.(1991).Media contents: The disciplinary study of news as discourse". In K. B. Jensen & N. Jankowski (Eds.). Handbook of qualitative methodologies in mass communication research. pp. 105-120. London: Routledge.