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Academic Journal UiTM Pulau Pinang

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Foreword

It is quite a commendable feat that within a short span of time since its last issue, the University Publication Centre (UPENA) of UiTM Pulau Pinang has produced its sixth volume of the Esteem Academic Journal UiTM Pulau Pinang. Of course, this issue would not come into fruition if not for the firm commitment and close cooperation of all the relevant parties involved.

First and foremost, I would like to extend my thanks to Associate Professor Mohd Zaki Abdullah, Director of UiTM Pulau Pinang, Associate Professor Dr Mohamad Abdullah Hemdi, Deputy Director of Academic Affairs and Associate Professor Ir. Damanhuri Jamalludin, Deputy Director of Research, Industry Linkages, Development & Maintenance for offering their continuous and untiring support. They were the driving force behind the successful publication of this journal. Time and again they rendered invaluable advice on how to address the problems that UPENA encountered in the publication of this academic journal.

UPENA highly appreciates the comments and expertise proffered by the panel of external reviewers when articles in this journal were sent to them for blind reviews. Likewise, UPENA also salutes the dedicated panel of language editors for their time in editing the authors' manuscripts.

However, all the assistance tendered would have been a futile effort if there were no authors willing to submit their articles for publication. This journal comprises articles on the social sciences and technology disciplines. I am proud to state that there is no shortage of writers from Penang and the response from them in these two disciplines has been overwhelming.

Lastly, I would like to urge more lecturers to submit their articles to UPENA. Authors' contributions of articles in this refereed journal help to disseminate and share knowledge with readers. It also helps to elevate the status of UiTM Pulau Pinang in research writing. In return, the authors gain recognition from the wider audience and also consideration for promotion in their career. It is a win-win situation for both parties. So lecturers, what are you waiting for? Put on your thinking caps and start contributing your research articles to UPENA.

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Enhancing Learning of Foreign Languages Through Film Subtitling

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ABSTRACT

The learning of foreign languages has always been a daunting task for both learners and educators. The existing learning tools do not cater for effective foreign language learning. FoLLetS courseware attempts to address this problem by incorporating audio, visual and text (via subtitles). In using FoLLetS, learners have autonomy in the learning process. In this study, 30 elementary learners of French, Mandarin and Japanese evaluated the courseware and the majority found it useful in enhancing their learning of foreign languages through film subtitling. They also provided comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the courseware.

Keywords: *film subtitling, learner autonomy, video clips, foreign language learning, subtitles*

Introduction

The learning of foreign languages has always been a daunting task for both learners and educators. Students learning a foreign language usually have to undergo a duration of time acquiring language skills. Educators, on the other hand, have to assist students to master a new language in the shortest possible period. They have to strike a balance to include

subject-matter (content) and interest to sustain students' focus and motivation in foreign language learning (FLL).

The advent of computers has made possible for students and educators who live in a media centric world to blend audio, video, photographs and animations as well as text with language and visual arts into one instrument for learning and teaching (Valmont, 2003). Even so, educators have to take into account students' own perceptions and experiences through their development of visual literacy. In order for FLL to succeed through the multimedia format, educators have to include both verbal and visual information to capture students' attention (Valmont, 2003).

Video clips in computers introduce learners to the authentic setting of the language leaning milieu (Sherman, 2003). It is practical to use authentic videos in FLL as students benefit from listening to the conversation and understanding contextual situations while watching the clips. Learners can also learn how to model such verbal responses in real life.

According to Brewood (2009), many people pick up languages simply by watching television programmes of films with subtitles. Watching such clips can also provide a more soothing and entertaining way of learning a language in an informal setting. With this in mind, this paper intends to investigate how a courseware which relies on film subtitling can enhance students' progress in FLL and to evaluate its usefulness and limitations. It is also developed to promote learner autonomy as learners can take charge of their learning process.

Learner Autonomy

Little (2007) states that the teacher's primary task in the development of FLL autonomy is dictated by three pedagogical principles, namely learner involvement, learner reflection and target language use. Statistical results obtained by Balçikanli (2008) have shown that experimental group with a strong tendency towards learner autonomy scored higher than those in the control group with a few exceptions in the learning of English at Preparatory School, Gaza University. It is essential that learner autonomy needs to be developed at universities so that foreign language (FL) learners be made accountable for their own learning. It can also develop their confidence and reduce their learning anxiety level (Nakanishi, 2002). While all agree that FL learners should develop independent learning,

educators seldom provide interesting and authentic language activities to sustain students' autonomy in FLL.

Subtitling

Neves (2004) found out that FL learners showed marked improvement in language skills after undergoing subtitling courses. He attributed such success to two factors, namely translation and audiovisual displays. The video clip area allows learners to view the film, both with and without subtitles. Depending on the objectives of the language activities carried out, students are exposed to the subtitles in either the foreign, mother tongue or both languages. The subtitle editor allows the students to edit and manipulate the subtitles. At the elementary and intermediate levels, subtitles are provided to boost beginners' confidence in FLL. They will otherwise be watching without making sense of these foreign films.

At the elementary and intermediate levels, beginners, who have watched without making sense of the foreign films, found that subtitles can boost their confidence in FLL. In fact, according to Danan (1992), film subtitling offers three links in the form of audio, visual and text instructions. These combinations permit longer retention in memory for grammar rules, greetings and lexical items. In fact, Canning-Wilson (2000) asserts that images in films can aid FLL if the learners can associate meaning with the lexical items displayed. The language exercises provide opportunities for learners to acquire new words employed in the audio-visual environment (Bayon, 2004). Some authors note that these subtitled video clips are comparatively better than still pictures in discovering new vocabulary (Al-Seghayer, 2001).

Courseware

FoLLetS courseware is adopted from LvS (Learning via Subtitling), which is an open source audio/video subtitling application, developed by the Hellenic Open University's Laboratory of Education Material in Greece for active FLL activities. LvS has been extensively used in foreign language learning and translation activities in Europe such as in Romania, Hungary, Greece, Britain, Portugal and Spain (Sokoli, 2006). FoLLetS courseware further introduces Mandarin, Japanese and French to foreign language learners and this study investigates the receptiveness and
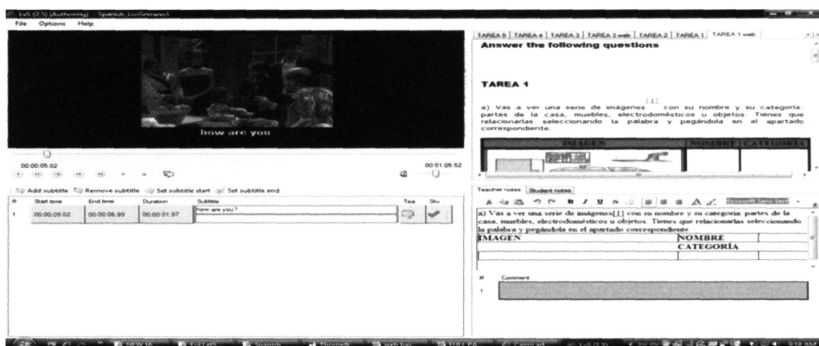
Figure 1: A printscreen of FoLLetS courseware

feedback of these learners towards the usage of this courseware. FoLLetS courseware is identical to LvS software as it consists of (i) the video clip (film) area (upper left corner) (ii) the instructions/text area (upper right corner) and (iii) the subtitle editor area (bottom). This paper does not intend to elaborate into the operations and functions of these respective areas. The user-friendly courseware enables learners to play, pause and stop the clips by clicking on the buttons. It also allows students to edit and manage the subtitles. Through FoLLetS courseware, learners watching foreign movie clips have semi/full autonomous control over the subtitles and time adjuster that dictate the pace of self pre-viewing, self-checking exercises and self-directed learning. Moreover, FLL students are immersed in the foreign environment of the target language. There is also the cultural element inherent in the audiovisual clippings. FLL students are exposed to the external trappings of the foreign setting besides learning the language itself.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this research was that it was carried out in only one branch campus of UiTM, a public Malaysian university where French, Mandarin and Japanese are offered as foreign language courses. Research into usage of film subtitling in FLL was not extended to other universities.

Secondly, the target groups investigated were only confined to foreign language learners at elementary level. They had followed some basic lessons and acquired rudimentary knowledge and vocabulary in the

respective foreign languages before using the FoLLetS courseware. Intermediate and advanced level students were not included in this study.

The language skills taken into account were largely restricted to easy listening conversation, reading simple instructions and basic writing exercises. As the beginners were still struggling with the lexical terms and making sense of the conversation in these clips, short movie clips and simple content were deliberately chosen by the researchers. Subtitles were added, removed and modified to relate and make sense of the conversation in the movie clips.

Definition of Terms

Video clips. It refers to short clips of video, usually part of a longer piece. In this study, the term movie clips is also used interchangeably and carries the same meaning. Clips are sourced from films, short movies, television commercials, sitcoms series and documentaries.

Film Subtitling. It refers to the textual display of the dialogue in films and television programmes which are usually viewed at the bottom of the screen. It facilitates viewers' comprehension of the story when translating the spoken dialogue which may be spoken in one language into another.

Methodology

The researchers use a set of questionnaire adapted from Web-based Evaluation of Courseware (Thao & Quynh, 1997) and Learner Autonomy through Computer Mediated Communication (Ranjit & Embi, 2007). The questionnaire relates to the evaluation of the courseware and learner autonomy.

Sample of Study

30 diploma students from the campus took part in the study. They comprised 10 students from each of the three respective foreign languages that they had signed up for. The three foreign language groups had registered for the Part 1 Elementary Level in Japanese, French and Mandarin. The subjects had been exposed to some basic lessons before they tested on the

courseware. The initial lessons included some common expressions used in greetings, simple vocabulary and grammar. The students were tested on their listening, reading and writing skills. They were from the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism and they were required to learn a foreign language since the mastery in other languages is considered as an asset for them when they seek for employment in future.

Data Collection Procedures

Ten students from three different foreign language groups were taken to the language labs at different times. The respective language lecturers briefed the students on the usage of subtitling tools designed specifically for language learning.

In the initial stage, the lecturers only briefed the students on how to use the courseware and subtitles to complete the exercises in the movie clips.

Students had to watch a video clip usually lasting from one to three minutes. This was followed by task activities based on the clips. They needed to insert the subtitles in the exercises. After viewing the video clips and completing the given exercises, students then proceeded to check their answers and scores they had obtained. The progress report was also displayed to the lecturers when students activated the final results button.

Instrumentation

Three types of questions were used for data collection in the study. They were

i.   A five-point Likert item questionnaire indicating students' degree of agreement to a particular statement towards FoLLetS courseware. There were altogether 18 questions.
ii. A yes/no question of whether this courseware should be recommended for students of FLL.
iii. Two open-ended format questions which give students an opportunity to express their comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the courseware. By including open format questions in the questionnaire, researchers can obtain frank insightful and even unexpected feedback on the courseware.

Findings & Discussion

Based on the data from both the quantitative analysis (in the form of Likert scale with 5 items & yes/no responses) and the qualitative approach (in the form of open-ended questions), the researchers are able to generally ascertain students' appraisals of this courseware. Researchers are able to determine the strengths and shortcomings of using the courseware with a view that students' feedback can assist in improving the courseware for FLL. The results and comments from both the quantitative and qualitative approaches were merged into 6 areas of discussion.

Subtitling

Subtitles have definitely helped students to understand the video clips. Even though less than 7% of the students strongly disagreed that subtitles helped them to understand the clips better and faster, the majority (almost 80%) agreed that subtitles helped them in comprehending the clips.

Depending on the goals and exercises given, students were instructed to make use of the subtitles to complete the exercises. They agreed that subtitles were able to assist them in the foreign language tasks.

As spoken form may differ from subtitles shown in the movie clips, lecturers need to have more translators to ensure the quality and accuracy of translation.

Ultimately, the goal is to do away with subtitles but at the elementary level, subtitles can help to boost confidence of students in FLL.

The majority of the students (>76%) agreed favourably on the easy usage of subtitles in completing the language tasks given. However, one respondent pointed out that *"The exercise) should include brief instructions or guide in using subtitles"*.

Understanding Cultural Norms and Contextual Settings

There is overwhelming agreement (80% of respondents) on the cultural and contextual elements shown in the clips. As culture is inextricably associated with language, students are not only exposed to linguistics but also to the socio-cultural information about habits, traditions and beliefs.

Table 1: Evaluation of FoLLetS Courseware in Foreign Language Learning

		Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Not Sure %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
1	I find that the subtitles are useful for me to understand the movie better.	6.7	0	3.3	43.3	46.7
2	I find that the subtitles are useful for me to understand the movie faster.	3.3	3.3	3.3	46.7	43.3
3	I find that the subtitles are easy for me to add/delete/change.	0	3.3	20.0	53.3	23.3
4	I find that the subtitles help me to complete the exercises.	0	6.7	10.0	63.3	20.0
5	I can understand the culture/custom in the movie clips.	0	6.7	13.3	66.7	13.3
6	I can understand the context/ setting in the movie clips.	0	6.7	10.0	66.7	16.7
7	I can watch clearly the visual images from the movie clips.	0	6.7	16.7	40.0	36.7
8	I can hear clearly the sounds from the movie clips.	0	10.0	26.7	33.3	30.0
9	I can read clearly all the words written in the courseware.	0	3.3	6.7	56.7	33.3
10	I can clearly understand all the words written in the courseware.	0	0	23.3	56.7	20.0
11	My listening ability of the foreign language has increased after using this courseware.	0	0	26.7	66.7	6.7
12	My vocabulary of the foreign language has increased after using this courseware.	0	0	36.7	50.0	13.3
13	My common expressions of the foreign language have increased after using this courseware.	0	6.7	33.3	46.7	13.3
14	My grammar of the foreign language has increased after using this courseware.	0	0	43.3	40.0	16.7
15	I can check the answers quickly with the automated results provided in the exercises.	3.3	0	6.7	46.7	43.3
16	I can improve on my mistakes with the automated results provided in the exercises.	3.3	3.3	0	66.7	26.7

(*table continues*)

Table 1 (*continued*)

	Strongly disagree %	Disagree %	Not Sure %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
17 By allowing me to choose the activities in this courseware, I can become more motivated to learn the foreign language.	3.3	3.3	0	60.0	33.3
18 By allowing me to choose the activities in this courseware, I can decide on what to learn in the foreign language.	3.3	3.3	3.3	56.7	33.3

Visual Images, Sounds and Text

The clear video clips and sounds bring about interactivity and sustained interest in FLL. The time adjuster next to the subtitle editor allows students to work out the exercises and prompts them to search out for the lexical items. For this part, none of them strongly disagreed against the audio-visual tool but some commented on the short video clips shown. They wanted to learn a foreign language, and so they wanted the clips to contain more conversation and vocabulary. However, most agreed (above 80%) that the audio-visual tool provided both education and entertainment –the balance recipe for interesting FLL.

Dialogue, verbal cues and gestures were easily understood by the viewers and one commented that "*I can learn both hearing and reading. It can make me know how to pronounce the French words easily*".

Enhancing Listening Ability and Acquiring Language Skills

It can be construed from the results that there was almost no disagreement with the benefits accrued from using FoLLetS courseware. The usual written feedback was "*It is so easy to learn. Help to correct my grammar, easier to understand the clip. Correct my mistakes. Learn to be alert with what people say. Stay focus*".

Nevertheless, almost one third was not sure whether they had really gained substantially from this courseware. Some students had complained of difficulty following the dialogue. They wanted it to be spoken at a slower pace. Lecturers had to deftly choose the clips for FLL without compromising on the natural speed of the conversation by native speakers.

Fortunately, this courseware allows students to replay the video sequences to focus on the parts that are overlooked. Moreover, the time adjuster for the duration set in subtitle editor permits students to zoom in on the required spoken conversation and vocabulary. Meaning can be grasped through the learning of old familiar words with new useful words in such audio-visual environment supported by subtitles. Lecturers have also played their role by constantly deciding on the amount of input (language content) to be taught and learners' listening capability to a new language.

Automated Results

The automated answers facilitated students to reflect and improve on the answers given. The checked answers certainly helped students to overcome their weaknesses. The minor shortcoming was that in some exercises there were only two choices available and students found them not challenging enough as there were only dual possibilities.

Tracking and student progress achievement were relayed to respective lecturers for further remedial or reinforcement of FLL activities. In other words, personalised attention can be tailored according to students' level of FLL.

Learner Autonomy

The courseware offers another alternative way of learning FLL. Students can rely on themselves to be fully aware of the way they want to learn, when they want to learn and how they can go about learning the language. Holec (1981) defines learning autonomy as 'students control over their learning process'. In this aspect, respondents were clearly aware of their freedom in using the courseware. There was almost insignificant percentage of students in the indecisive 'not sure' choice. Over 90% of the respondents responded positively to having autonomy in selection of language content and skills when using this courseware.

Students' Recommendation of FoLLetS Courseware

They were 100% supportive of the courseware. Positive comments were that the "*courseware was different from other courseware*" and "*can be good in learning third language*".

Conclusion

Overall, FoLLetS courseware received strong positive comments as an edutainment tool utilising film subtitling in FLL. Ultimately, learners are the most important players in the evaluation process. Their responses provide a checklist to help lecturers to improve on the courseware for additional educational value in FLL. Although the main focus is about how agreeable language activities could be carried out using film subtitling, students also have to assess the interconnected features embedded in the courseware as they also influence FLL. These include the audio-visual aspects, language enhancement and learner autonomy.

As far as the feedback from the students is concerned, the present study bodes well for continuation development of the courseware in FLL. Firstly, the courseware is user-friendly and easy to handle with little need for elaborate explanation and continuous assistance. Here lies the biggest asset as learners are not bogged down by technical know-how constraints but concentrate solely on learning the foreign language. Lecturers, on the other hand, need to consider the respondents' comments especially on the strengths and limitations. The exercises need to be improved not only to prepare students for the elementary level but also to cater for higher levels. The courseware offers learners the autonomy to learn a new language which involves simple manipulation of subtitles in the edutainment application. Lastly, the subtitles provide the input for learners to acquire multi-skills in FLL. The use of subtitles can be so varied depending on the objectives in different language exercises. Lecturers have to ponder its relevance and effectiveness before incorporating subtitles into video clips.

Future Work

This paper is the first attempt to gauge students' receptiveness and critical comments towards FLL using video subtitling application. Future improvement have to take cognizance of the need to research language activities at higher levels not only in terms of academic field but also to equip students with foreign language mastery for employment purpose and life-long learning. They may include:

i. Embedding a voice recorder to study on whether learners' oral skills and proficiency activities in foreign languages can be enhanced.
ii. Expanding the learner autonomy approach to include it as being

favoured by adult learners in long distance learning and identify the effectiveness of the approach using the courseware in FLL.

iii. Implementing an experimental study on the effectiveness of video subtitling application among undergraduates learning foreign languages. Comparative results of control and treatment groups will then shed more light and evidence on its effectiveness.

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