

7 LipDub: a technology-enhanced language learning project with music

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Abstract

This chapter presents a technology-enhanced language learning project that was undertaken with advanced first-year university students of German. The students created a LipDub video, which is a music video that combines lip-synching and audio dubbing and can be filmed on any recording device with a camera. To participate in this group project, the students had to use technology and work collaboratively outside of the classroom. The project also involved language learning since the students had to work on their pronunciation and listening comprehension. The videos were, thereafter, incorporated into a formal language lesson in the university's multi-media centre, where the students completed various language tasks with the videos. The videos differed from standard LipDub videos, but the students' overall feedback, based on written reports, the module evaluation questionnaire, and oral responses, was overwhelmingly positive for both the project and the lesson.

Keywords: project-based and collaborative work, use of technology, autonomous learning, music, pronunciation.

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1. Introduction

This chapter presents a technology-enhanced language learning project carried out with advanced first-year students of German. Over the Independent Learning Week in October 2016, the students of a first-year module were instructed to create a LipDub video. A LipDub is a type of music video that combines lip-synching and audio dubbing. A group of people are filmed lip-synching while listening to a song. Afterwards, the video is edited and the original audio of the song is dubbed over the video. It can be filmed on any recording device with a camera.

LipDub videos can be found all over the world now, with many schools using them for media didactics in particular. Though they are not a new concept, the term only originated in the mid-2000's. Lip-synching, karaoke, and other forms of singing have been around much longer, also in the foreign language classroom. Songs are authentic texts, which can be used to train language skills, teach cultural aspects, and facilitate pronunciation. [Rodríguez Cemillán \(2014\)](#) also writes that music and singing are simply “fun”. She lists various activities for the use of songs in language teaching, especially for speaking.

This is not necessarily represented in textbooks. When [Badstübner-Kizik \(2004\)](#) looked at German foreign language textbooks, she noticed that if music was included, the activities would rarely focus on speech production but rather on comprehension. Additionally, she found more classical than modern music included in textbooks. [Badstübner-Kizik \(2004\)](#) goes on to argue that songs support language activities in the classroom, which can provide an authentic glimpse into the foreign culture.

Furthermore, [Badstübner-Kizik \(2007\)](#) explains various functions for music in foreign language teaching, including the support of receptive and productive skills (e.g. written and oral, reading and listening comprehension, and pronunciation), the support of a conscious perception (e.g. creativity, patience), the promotion of reflection (e.g. cooperation, motivation) and the promotion of cultural knowledge (e.g. celebrities such as singers, history).

According to [Christiner and Reiterer \(2015\)](#), there is also a link between singing and speaking as these acts are activated in similar areas of the brain. They both use the vocal motor system, so there is a strong similarity between the production of speech and song. Therefore, the main linguistic aim of this project was working on the pronunciation, which meant shaping the lips the right way for lip-syncing. To make it look real, students had to actually sing loudly while filming, thus pronouncing the words like the singers.

Students also worked on their listening skills because they had to listen very carefully to imitate the sounds of the song. When looking up the lyrics, they used their reading skills and translated parts of (or the whole) song. Further aims were exploring an allegedly “fun” way of engaging with the target language in an informal educational setting, which helped the students get to know each other and spark an interest in music from German-speaking countries. All these aims are reflected in the literature mentioned above.

2. Description of the project

The thirty-nine participating students were first-year undergraduates in their first semester at university. Their module consisted of one content lecture, one content tutorial, and two language tutorials per week, with each tutorial group having approximately ten students. It was aimed at advanced students who had already passed Scottish Highers, A Levels, or an equivalent qualification in German before coming to university. Their level of German was B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR).

2.1. Instructions

General instructions were given to the students in German, while the technical instructions relating to synchronisation were given in English. The students had to form groups of four to six and choose a song approximately two minutes long. Participants were encouraged to find songs they liked, but some suggestions were provided. Everyone had to be in front of the camera at least once. Students

could use their phone or any recording device with a camera for filming. As it was a group project, not everyone had to be technologically savvy, as only one person per group needed to know how to complete the technical work.

Additionally, each group had to write a report in German about the work stages of the video production, including when they met, why they chose a particular song, how they prepared filming, what went well, and what did not work well. They could also add any further comments about the project to encourage reflection on the process of filming. The reports would provide data on whether the workload was appropriate. Students had approximately two weeks to finish the project. Although the project was not assessed, the reports and the final videos provided evidence of high student engagement with the task.

2.2. Filming procedure

The technology component involved working with a recording device and dubbing the video with the original song. Students did not have to edit the video (or the song). Since they had to plan, organise, and complete the video on their own outside the classroom setting, the project promoted autonomous learning in an informal language learning environment. Students did not ask for help and worked well together, according to the reports. They learned how to work in a team with a common goal, which is an important employability skill. From personal observation, students appeared to be highly motivated because they could choose any song in the target language. When they first heard of the project, they were very excited and immediately started brainstorming possible songs.

2.3. Follow-up activities

The videos were incorporated into a formal language lesson in the university's multi-media centre a few days later. This was a fifty-minute class in a room with computers. Each student worked on a computer and got a worksheet in German. They had to complete several language tasks while watching the videos within a time limit. The assembled tasks focussed on various language skills. Sample

tasks included making a telephone call about a video, recording a comparison between two videos, chatting online with the other students about another video, filling in gaps, answering questions, and translating lyrics. In addition, students were asked to write a comment about one of the videos in the Moodle forum and respond to one comment.

3. Outcomes

The outcomes of this project are based on personal observation of the students in class, talking with them, and reading their reports and their written module evaluation at the end of the semester. From these sources, it has become apparent that the students enjoyed each other's videos and making their own. Due to copyright issues, the videos were not published online, and they were taken down from the school server at the end of the semester. The song selection was slightly surprising as the students chose rather old, well-known songs. All songs were deemed appropriate as they did not have any explicit language or deal with controversial subjects.

Not all groups followed the guidelines carefully, so some videos were not consistent with the definition of a LipDub video. The videos had been edited, some groups even added special effects for transitions and there was almost no movement, which LipDub videos usually have. Furthermore, the students did not always sing loudly, which was part of the instructions. There was no feedback given about the reason, but students may have been too self-conscious to sing loudly in front of their classmates or in public, as a lot of videos were filmed in public spaces. The reports (of different lengths) showed that some groups had minor problems with the video editing software. Even though help was offered, it was not requested.

Although pronunciation was a language focus of this project, no immediate feedback was provided to the students. As the filming took place in an informal and autonomous setting, there was no teacher to correct the students. The aim was to imitate the pronunciation of the song, but only as an exercise.

The bonding between the group members had a positive effect on the dynamics in the classroom, which could be observed without difficulty. Friendships started to form or deepen, and students became more comfortable with each other. They developed their social skills.

4. Conclusion

The project and its outcomes correspond with the literature presented in the introduction of this chapter. The students' oral and written feedback was positive for both the project and the lesson. That is not to say that every single student enjoyed the project, but there was no openly negative feedback. Overall, they were motivated by choosing an authentic modern song. It was "fun" for them (Rodríguez Cemillán, 2014, p. 53). There was varied training on all five language skills, e.g. written when they had to write a comment and oral with the imitation of the original singing. The students were creative and cooperative. They also expanded their cultural knowledge when researching the songs and understanding the lyrics as well as the (historical) context (Badstübner-Kizik, 2007). Additionally, they worked on their social skills, e.g. teamwork.

The learning process that the students went through would be an interesting topic for further research on the use of LipDub videos. Another aspect worth exploring would be the students' motivation. Is singing along more of an incentive to practise pronunciation than traditional pronunciation exercises? If so, this would support the case for more use of music in foreign language teaching, particularly focussing on pronunciation.

Through undertaking projects like the one presented here, the LipDub video will become better-known for teaching purposes. Using songs to teach a language or culture is easily applicable and requires little effort for teachers. Teachers should not be afraid to use materials they might not be formally trained with. Testing various methods might also help with the diversity of learners as teachers can accommodate individual needs better.

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