Selecting and using authentic videos for intentional second language learning: nine considerations

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Although using video to facilitate language learning is an exceedingly common practice, both for in-class and out-of-class learning, at present the literature exploring the use of authentic videos for intentional language learning is void of a user-friendly framework that educators and learners can refer to when selecting and using authentic videos to optimise language learning. To bridge this gap in the literature, the authors of this paper have drawn from a range of relevant research pertaining to cognitive neuroscience, educational psychology, and second language acquisition, as well as over two decades of combined personal experience as professional language educators, to develop a theoretical framework delineating nine research-based considerations educators and learners should bear in mind when selecting, using, and/or prescribing authentic videos to facilitate optimal language learning.

Key words:
Second language acquisition; deliberate practice; video; EFL; ESL; depth of processing

Introduction

Using videos for second language education is not new, with research into this exceedingly common practice dating back to the 1980s (e.g., Price, 1983). Although outlining a range of possible learning outcomes, including incidental vocabulary acquisition (e.g., Arndt & Woore, 2018; Rodgers & Webb, 2020), improved listening comprehension (e.g., Rodgers & Webb, 2017), enhanced reading proficiency (e.g., Rodgers & Webb, 2017), and increased motivation (e.g., Metruk, 2018; Park & Jung, 2016), the literature exploring the use of videos for second language learning has yet to provide an overarching framework delineating not only how to deliberately engage with videos to maximise learning outcomes, but also how to select authentic videos most amenable for learning.

Utilising research from an array of fields, including educational psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and second language acquisition (SLA), and inspired by the notion of deliberate practice (Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson & Pool, 2016), which has been defined as "practice carried out with the deliberate intention of improving performance" (Pachman et al., 2013, p. 108), this paper will attempt to bridge the above-stated gap by presenting a theoretical framework outlining nine research-based considerations that educators and learners should be mindful of when selecting and making use of authentic videos (i.e., videos not created explicitly for the purposes of language learning) to enhance language learning in a more deliberate and focused way (for a discussion on deliberate practice and language learning see DeKeyser, 2007).

However, before proceeding, it is important to note that while we do not discount the valuable role extensive video viewing inside and outside the classroom can play in language learning, especially since it "could help to fill the need for greater L2 input in EFL contexts with limited exposure to L2 input" (Webb, 2015, p. 159), we do affirm that time should also be devoted to intentional learning (i.e., deliberate practice) – as this approach to learning has been shown to enhance knowledge and performance (e.g., Ericsson & Pool, 2016) – as well as increase student self-efficacy and motivation, especially when results are visible (Busse, 2014; Kirschner & Hendrick, 2020). Additionally, intentional learning strategies generally promote deeper levels of cognitive engagement and processing. These are requisites for meaningful and robust learning, a factor which cannot be ignored. Keeping these points in mind, let us now turn our attention to nine interconnected considerations for selecting and using authentic videos for intentional second language learning.

Consideration 1: Maximise attention

Underscoring the critical role attention plays in learning, Posner and Rothbart (2014) assert that "attention to the learned material" (p. 14) may be the most crucial factor that influences learning. This assertion, congruent with Alessi and Trollip's (2001) claim that learning starts with "attention to and perception of information in the learner's environment" (p. 21), and supported by findings from cognitive neuroscience (e.g., Chun & Turk-Browne, 2007; Stevens & Bavelier, 2012), cognitive psychology (e.g., Craik & Lockhart, 1972; Kirschner & Hendrick, 2020), and SLA research (e.g., Schmidt, 2012; Tomlin & Villa, 1994), reminds us that since "people learn about the things that they pay attention to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to" (Schmidt, 2012, p. 28), one's level of attention and engagement should be of primary concern when engaging in bouts of intentional learning.

To maximise attention, we recommend (1) selecting content that is either relevant or highly compelling to the learner, (2) choosing videos that do not exceed the

learner's ability to pay attention, and (3) prescribing strategies that focus the learner's attention towards the to-be-learned material by having them engage in some form of activity or task while watching the video (e.g., while watching the video, make a note of how many times you hear an order word such as, first, next, then; pause the video every time you encounter an unknown lexical item; and add it to your personal word list).

Consideration 2: Encourage depth of processing

Building on from the first consideration, and congruent with findings from educational and cognitive psychology showing that learning is enhanced when stimuli is processed at a deeper level (e.g., Craik & Lockhart, 1972; Eysenck, 1982; Kirschner & Hendrick, 2020) and when practice is deliberate (Ericsson & Pool, 2016; Suzuki et al., 2019), research exploring the role that depth of processing (DoP) (i.e., the relative amount of cognitive effort applied to encoding, decoding, or analysing input) plays in second language learning has consistently shown that processing the target language in a deeper and more elaborate way generally leads to better lexical retention, greater language comprehension, and more robust long-term learning (e.g., Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001; Leow & Mercer, 2015; Morgan-Short et al., 2012; Schmidt, 2012). On account of these findings, we encourage educators and learners to incorporate a range of bottom-up (i.e., phoneme-level building up to discourse-level), top-down (i.e., contextual and schematic knowledge), and metacognitive (i.e., being conscious of how one learns and which strategies facilitate effective learning) language learning strategies (Nguyen & Newton, 2018; Vandergrift et al., 2006) as a means of increasing one's DoP in an attempt to maximise the learning potential that videos afford (for specific cognitive and metacognitive strategies, see Thompson & Rubin, 1996).

Approaches to increasing a learner's DoP may include notetaking, paraphrasing, looking up unknown lexical items in the dictionary, vocabulary recall and use activities, semantic mapping, or any other engagement strategy that prompts a learner to analyse, encode, decode, and/or process linguistic input in a more elaborate and cognitively engaged manner (see Leow & Mercer, 2015).

Consideration 3: Consider the learners' needs & goals

It is of primary importance that educators account for their students' language learning needs and goals during the video selection process, which can be ascertained via a short discussion or survey (i.e., a needs and goals analysis). By doing so, educators are not only in a better position to select videos that contain examples of the specific language the student aims to learn, but they are also in a better position to choose appropriate engagement strategies to facilitate language learning in a more

targeted way. For example, let's assume a student needs to learn order words (e.g., first, next, then) for their job as a chef. Employing a narrow viewing approach (i.e., watching several shorter videos of different chefs preparing meals) would be more advisable to taking an extensive viewing approach (i.e., watching several videos on an array of topics), simply due to the increased repetition of the target language narrow viewing has been shown to provide (see Rodgers & Webb, 2011).

As such, we recommend that educators bear in mind their learners' needs and goals when selecting which videos and learning strategies are most suited to helping their learners realise their language learning aspirations, especially since it is the engagement strategies one uses and the videos one selects which ultimately dictate what is learned while engaging with videos for intentional language learning. Furthermore, when learner needs and interests do not align, pointing out the relevance of a selected video to the learner could help persuade them to engage with the video to achieve their own personal language goals.

Consideration 4: Choose appropriate content

Consistent with arguments put forward by King (2002) and Oddone (2011), Berk (2009) asserts that educators need to take a measured approach to video selection if videos are to be used as an effective educational tool, and provides three sets of criteria to consider when selecting videos for pedagogical purposes: (1) the student's characteristics, (2) the video's offensiveness, and (3) the video's structure. Specifically referencing the second set of criteria, Berk (2009) suggests that since inappropriate, offensive, or irrelevant material could inadvertently detract from learning, educators should establish a clear set of standards they can refer to during the video selection process outlining the appropriacy and acceptability of the content for teaching-learning, and reject any content that is "borderline or potentially offensive" (p. 7).

At a minimum, educators need to consider their students' ages, cultural backgrounds, and religious beliefs when selecting video content for language learning purposes, since it is these factors which contribute to the overall appropriateness of a given topic, genre, or linguistic feature (e.g., taboo language) portrayed in each video. It is our belief that by considering their learners' specific sociocultural demographics and learning contexts, educators can avoid exposing learners to inappropriate or offensive material which could potentially undermine the students' willingness to engage with authentic videos for language learning.

Based on the aforementioned factors relating to appropriateness of video content, one method that educators can utilise is to watch the clip to be presented in class (or prescribed for out-of-class viewing) in its entirety and accept or reject the selected video. Alternately, if a video contains smaller sections that could possibly

be offensive, those could be noted and removed using video editing software, or be skipped completely (King, 2002).

Consideration 5: Account for the learners' current background knowledge

The notion of schema, defined as the collection of knowledge and experience a learner already possesses in relation to a given topic or concept (Kirschner & Hendrick, 2020; Nguyen & Newton, 2018), should be of primary concern during the video selection process due to the fact that not only is one's potential for learning enhanced when new knowledge builds onto existing knowledge (Schraw, 2006), but when it comes to language learning, deeper levels of content schemata (i.e., prior knowledge of a particular subject matter) and formal schemata (i.e., prior knowledge of the rhetorical structures of a text) have been shown to positively affect both comprehension and the acquisition of new vocabulary (Nguyen & Newton, 2018).

With the above points in mind, educators are encouraged to either select videos related to topics students already possess background knowledge in, often because of their own experience and interest in the topic, or to engage in schema building/activation activities prior to viewing the video. For example, before watching a video, students might engage in such schema building activities as making predictions, skimming a related text for gist, or brainstorming related vocabulary (for a range of schema building activities, see Nguyen & Newton, 2018).

Consideration 6: Align clip duration with the learner's goals, age, and ability

The video's duration restricts the feasibility of various approaches to engaging with video, and potentially contributes to cognitive overload and wavering attention, especially in cases where clip duration exceeds the learner's capacity to concentrate — a relationship that has been linked to language ability (Cakir, 2006; King, 2002; Thompson & Rubin, 1996), with more advanced learners having a higher second language tolerance than lower-ability learners, and age (Arifani, 2020). Thus, steps need to be taken to ensure videos are of an appropriate length so as not to inadvertently promote passive or disengaged viewing, as this particular type of viewing does not lead to appreciable learning (Donley, 2000; Tuncay, 2014; Vanderplank, 2019).

For younger learners (who generally possess shortened attention spans), Arifani (2020) suggests a clip duration of 2-6 minutes, whereas for lower-ability learners, Thompson & Rubin (1996) suggest clips ranging from 30 seconds to two minutes, while Cakir (2006) simply recommends that the video duration be shorter than videos utilised by more proficient learners. However, although these times may be used as a guide, to date, no research can answer what the ideal video duration is

to promote optimal language learning; hence, we believe that the learner's level of attention and engagement should ultimately dictate the duration of a selected video for intentional language learning.

Consideration 7: Select videos containing optimal comprehensible input

An additional consideration for intentional language learning is the provision of optimal L2 input. As Krashen and Bland (2014) point out, it has been hypothesised that optimal comprehensible input features messages that are highly interesting – *compelling* – to the learner, as well as being comprehensible, rich in language, and abundant (Krashen & Mason, 2020). The input may be so compelling that the learner is "hardly aware that it is in a different language" (Krashen & Bland, 2014, p. 2). Depending upon the learner's age, language ability, and interests, sources of compelling input (e.g., movies, television, YouTube) may vary. However, as Donley (2000) points out, the speech and language contained in many authentic movies and television shows is overly fast, difficult, and idiomatic for many students to comprehend, a position also supported by Oddone (2011). To mitigate this issue, teachers could either select videos with input that is easier to comprehend, and/or guide learners to use specific intentional engagement strategies. For example, viewing sheets consisting of multiple-choice questions to answer can not only be used to focus learners' attention, provide scaffolding, and preview/review vocabulary, but they can also function as a motivational tool (Donley, 2000) thanks to the clear indication of learning and comprehension they provide.

Additionally, due to the fact that the format and the genre of a given video will not only influence the lexical resources, linguistic register, paralinguistic, and pragmatic features it contains (Vanderplank, 2016a; Webb & Rodgers, 2009), but also the video's appropriateness, duration, and extraneous cognitive load, educators and learners are urged to carefully consider which formats and genres are most suited to meet their individual learning needs (for an in-depth analysis of the vocabulary demands for various genres of television, see Webb & Rogers, 2009). For example, to find out more about the format and genre of videos that students are interested in, a simple survey (e.g., using Google Forms) can be prepared at the beginning of a course, asking students to list a few videos that they enjoy and use for language learning, and where they can be accessed. If the content is suitable, this method can provide a small library of possible videos to include in a course.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that it is the lexical density (i.e., total number of words), lexical diversity (i.e., number of unique words), lexical repetition (i.e., frequency of occurrence), and grammatical complexity, in both objective/absolute and subjective/relative terms (see Miestamo et al., 2008), of the language in a given

video which largely influences the potential for learners to expand their linguistic knowledge. Therefore, we recommend not only choosing content containing language that learners can comprehend with limited difficulty (so as not to impose too great a cognitive load on the learner), but also ensuring learners are using strategies aimed at maximising meaningful linguistic engagement, focus, and DoP. For example, lower-proficiency adult students could engage actively (i.e., using deliberate practice) with short video clips originally designed for younger learners, which are generally less lexically and grammatically demanding, and provide a generous amount of lexical repetition. Such content can easily be found for free on websites such as YouTube.

Lastly, an often-overlooked element of video selection relates to the paralinguistic features of the speaker(s) in the video. These features, which consist of body language, gestures, facial expressions, accent, prosody, vocal volume, speed of speech, and any other language feature not processed at the semantic level, greatly contribute to the intended meaning of a given utterance. As King (2002, p. 6) points out, a movie may contain a compelling storyline, but the "enunciation, speed, and accent" of its characters' voices might frustrate students due to incomprehensibility. Thus, as King (2002) notes, videos containing scenes that balance dialogue with optimal visual support, suitable speech delivery, and clear sound and picture are recommended. Further, teachers may explicitly draw attention to specific paralinguistic features (e.g., ironic air quotes or crossing fingers for good luck) by providing a simple multiple-choice gloss on a viewing sheet or the whiteboard for students to answer, followed by an elaboration of the feature(s) in question within the context of the video. Therefore, we suggest educators not only draw their learners' attention towards the lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic features of the language employed in a video, but also the paralinguistic features.

Consideration 8: Mitigate extraneous load

Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) (Sweller, 2010) is a theory of learning which places primacy on working memory and attention, and posits that instructional design should take into account the limitations of the learner's cognitive system in order to yield the best learning outcomes (Hughes, Costley, & Lange, 2021; Schnotz & Kürschner, 2007; Sweller et al., 2011). Comprised of *extraneous load* (i.e., cognitive resources devoted to elements that do not contribute to learning), *germane load* (i.e., the amount of cognitive effort devoted to learning), and *intrinsic load* (i.e., the cognitive demands inherent to the task or subject), recent research exploring CLT as it relates to second language learning advocates not only for employing educational practices which reduce the amount of extraneous load, but also for designing and implementing learning protocols aimed at increasing germane load to foster more effective learning (e.g., Hughes, Costley, & Lange, 2021; Lee & Mayer, 2018; Sweller, 2017).

In light of this, educators and learners need to be aware that excessive background interference (i.e., extraneous load), such as distracting sound effects or overly loud music may impede language learning in situations where the background interference (i.e., noise) negatively affects speech intelligibility (i.e., signal) (see Hygge et al., 2015; Kjellberg et al., 2008). Furthermore, irrelevant activity, or convoluted storylines (i.e., non-linear stories/events) which force the learner to simultaneously split their attention between conflicting stimuli or direct their cognitive resources towards extraneous non-linguistic elements, could also negatively impact language learning (see Hughes et al., 2021; Sweller, 2017). As such, we advise educators and learners to consider which genres and formats (e.g., news broadcast, movie, talk show) are most responsible for imposing additional extraneous load, and then either choosing learning strategies (e.g., schema building, providing a synopsis of the story/events) to manage this additional cognitive load, or, if possible, selecting videos with less background interference.

Consideration 9: Use appropriate text-based engagement strategies

A common approach to English study with video incorporates the use of either subtitles (i.e., translation into another language) or captions (i.e., same language transcription). Although a seemingly easy consideration to account for, there are several factors which should be kept in mind when it comes to using text-based support for language learning.

First, the addition of captions does not necessarily make the video comprehensible, since it is the learner's reading proficiency which largely determines whether captions are comprehensible or not (Wang & Tragant, 2019). Second, reading and listening simultaneously may be too cognitively demanding for some learners, so comprehension could be affected (Diao et al., 2007; Wang & Tragant, 2019). Third, autogenerated text (often found on platforms such as YouTube) is prone to lexical and grammatical errors. Lastly, the learning outcomes of captions and subtitles may differ depending on the students' language proficiency (Danan, 2004; Pujadas & Muñoz, 2019), strategies used (Montero et al., 2018; Vanderplank, 2019), experience with on-screen text-based support (Vanderplank, 2019; Taylor, 2005), L1 (Vanderplank, 2016b; Winke et al., 2013), and goals (e.g., improved reading, improved listening, vocabulary learning) (Diao et al., 2007). For example, gist-reading using captions will yield different results to intentional vocabulary learning strategies utilising the exact same captions, as the former facilitates global comprehension whereas the latter intentionally promotes greater DoP for selected items, therefore generating more robust learning and lexical retention.

With the above points in mind, care should be taken to ensure that any text-based support is error-free (e.g., by thoroughly reviewing the video), suited to the learner's

reading ability and learning goals (e.g., if a learner's reading ability is insufficient, or the captions are too fast, they may not have enough time to read the captions, therefore directing them to pause and/or rewind the video to allow more time to digest said material is recommended), and used strategically, especially since the overuse or misuse of text-based support could impede language learning instead of support it (Pujola, 2002).

Conclusion

Premised on a range of relevant literature from cognitive neuroscience, educational psychology, and SLA, this paper has presented nine research-based considerations educators (and learners, if possible) should bear in mind when selecting and using authentic videos to facilitate intentional language learning. These nine factors are based on a host of research suggesting that for optimal language learning outcomes to be achieved via the use of authentic video, educators need to consider not only the pedagogical intent, educational context, and the socio-demographic variables of their students, they also need to consider their students' specific interests, the type and level of learner engagement (i.e., attention and depth of language processing), their learners' current language competencies, and the video's linguistic content, genre, and format. In addition to these factors, the nine considerations presented above advocate for educators to espouse engagement strategies that increase the likelihood of visible language learning outcomes, since discernible learning has not only been linked to increased feelings of self-efficacy and motivation, but also has the potential to foster a more virtuous language learning cycle. There is little dispute that increasing the quantity of (optimal) comprehensible input is beneficial for learners, as it promotes incidental and implicit learning; however, the merits of taking a more deliberate learning approach are too numerous to be overlooked. Therefore, we propose a dual-learning approach, which pairs viewing to boost comprehensible input and foster implicit learning with a more focused and intentional learning approach in order to accelerate and maximise learning outcomes. For ease of reference, we have included a table (see Appendix A) for teachers to refer to when utilising authentic videos to facilitate language learning.

In closing, it is pertinent to note that there is no such thing as the perfect video nor perfect engagement strategy for intentional language learning, and as such, educators will have to make inevitable trade-offs in the way they select and utilise videos to promote such learning (e.g., selecting for duration vs. selecting for interest). Nevertheless, it is our contention that the more of the aforementioned factors listed in this paper are accounted for during the learning process, the more profitable intentional engagement with authentic videos for language learning will be.

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Appendix A

Selecting and Using Authentic Videos for Intentional Second Language Learning: Considerations and Suggestions

	Considerations	Suggestions
1	Maximise attention	- Choose videos students are interested in - Point out the relevance of selected videos - Select videos of an appropriate length for your learners
2	Encourage depth of processing	- Teach learners how to actively engage with videos in order to promote DoP - Implement multiple active-learning strategies for repeated viewings of a single video (e.g., paraphrasing, note-taking, listing, creating semantic maps, making flashcards) - Encourage learners to go beyond simply watching for gist or entertainment
3	Consider the learner's needs & goals	- Perform a needs analysis - Recommend learning strategies to meet specified goals - Highlight the relevance of the selected video to the learner's goal
4	Choose appropriate content	- Review selected media and accept, reject, edit, or skip video sections - Choose content in relation to learner context and demographics
5	Account for the learner's current background knowledge	- Select videos relevant to learner interests - Use schema activation/building activities (e.g., brainstorming, explicitly providing background information of the video, pre-teaching key vocabulary)
6	Align clip duration with the learner's goals, age, & ability	- Pick videos that fall within the limits of the learner's capacity to pay attention - Monitor for signs of disengaged viewing, and either re-focus the learner's attention or end the video

	Considerations	Suggestions
7	Select videos containing optimal comprehensible input	- Utilise videos that have compelling input - Choose videos learners can comprehend with limited difficulty while still providing a slight linguistic challenge -Consider formats and genres that are suited to specific learning goals
8	Mitigate extraneous load	- Pick videos with minimal amounts of loud or distracting noise, music, or sound effects - Opt for videos with linear storylines for lower-proficiency learners and progress to less linear storylines as language ability becomes more proficient - Build/activate schema before viewing
9	Use appropriate text-based engagement strategies	- Match text-based support with the learners' reading abilities, proficiency levels, and learning goals - Teach students active viewing strategies utilising the appropriate text-based support (e.g., read aloud, reverse translation, read and then recall)