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THE USE OF YOUTUBE LANGUAGE LEARNING VIDEOS ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to analyze the use of youtube language learning videos on language teaching and learning. Techniques used by youtube language learning videos include repetition drills, listening to a teacher, and learning a foreign language in your sleep, through binaural beats, which create a frequency that helps you relax like in meditation and absorb new information. An article from *Independent*, June 30 2014, written by James Vincent, confirms that we actually learn new information while asleep. How does this have an impact on classroom activity? In what ways should teachers change their foreign language teaching methodology?

Keywords: technology, sleep, methodology.

1. Literature review

Learning a foreign language implies being exposed to hearing it being spoken. Teachers recommend when you wish to learn a foreign language to listen to tv shows and films in the respective language. Often the decision to learn a foreign language comes from saying that we like the way it sounds.

However, learning a foreign language is not complete just from listening to it. We still need to acquire the necessary grammar notions of it and, of course, practice it, in writing and speaking. Being a good listener is not enough. Nowadays, youtube videos present us with a variety of foreign language lessons. The clips are shorter or longer. Some clips only contain words with translation, some contain dialogues, while others contain video material. Some more attractive youtube videos contain the promise of learning a foreign language in our sleep. This is due, they claim, to binaural beats. They use frequencies that allow you to relax, like in meditation techniques, and learn while in a state of complete relaxation. Some experiments state that learning a foreign language in your sleep is possible, while others say it is not possible. James Vincent (2014) states that it is possible, to a certain extent, to acquire some degree of knowledge in our sleep. This proves that it is not an instant solution and we expect to combine the use of audio and visual material with the classical teaching methods when it comes to any foreign language.

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Since English has become a global language, Romania shares with European countries the views regarding the teaching of English as a second language. Before Romania joined the European Union, things were different, as necessities for learners were different. A language that is learnt cannot be separated from its use in the world outside the classroom. Changing requirements and needs lead to this conclusion:

Romanian teachers and their students are said to be the best among the European speakers of English, with the least country-specific accent. One reason we are so good at this: before 1989, English was studied in very few schools in Romania, the main modern languages studied at the time being Russian, French and German (French and German being obviously preferred, but Russian being almost compulsory); after the Romanian Revolution in 1989, English gradually became the first modern language in schools, while the interest for Russian dropped so drastically that now there are very few schools studying it. The interest for German has never been too high and French lost lots of ground to English. (Tirban 2013: 77)

We see that when it comes to learning a language, we meet the needs to adapt and to be included in a certain group. We learn the respective language as everyone else is interested in it. Nowadays, though, youtube videos promote learning languages also as a hobby or simply to use them when travelling to a certain country where not everyone knows English.

Culturally, the role of English and English itself have been changing over time, and students need to be aware of these changes:

The growing prominence of regional and local varieties of English has several implications for English teaching in the 21st century. First, English teachers will need to reconceptualize how they conceive of the link between language and culture. It is outdated to teach students to speak and make up using a single, standardized English grammar. Activities in the English classroom in the past focused on a particular dialogue, a standardized and homogenous cultural identity. Now since we arrived in the 21st century the professors must widen their curricular perspectives and bring into line their teaching with the real-life multi-cultural and multi-modal communication needs of their students who more and more live and work in a globalized society. (Tirban 2013: 78)

Audiovisual material should help teachers today. Due to youtube videos, teachers and students will have access to authentic, less standard English used in a variety of contexts.

The changing social and cultural environment has influenced English and the way it should be taught to foreigners as well. Yet, all this does not exclude the so-called traditional methods, teaching grammar and grammar-translation. The new methods can be used along with the old ones for variety. If we use old textbooks, from another historical context, such as those before Romania joined the European Union, which can reflect an outdated culture, the cultural studies within these textbooks should be updated.

A suggestion to combine innovative, creative methods with traditional methods is given in an activity proposed by Onofrei, Precup-Stiegelbauer, and Tirban (2013: 341-342), who combine teaching based on a psychological method with the traditional method of teaching through translation. They teach ESP creatively to students at the University of Arts by using a warm up “introduced by Lozanov, the Bulgarian psychotherapist, who discovered that students can learn a language approximately three to five times as quickly as through traditional conventional ways of teaching” (341). Students listen to Vivaldi’s *Seasons*, then they are asked to express their own opinion on the seasons of the year, then to guess the name of the artist and they move on to translation:

Though it is considered that translation is a traditional method, we consider that it is very useful for acquiring new vocabulary and for recycling the one which is latent, in a passive state. Consequently, students are asked to work on different translation parts in pairs, one of the students has a higher level of knowledge than his/her colleague. In pairs, they negotiate meaning, they focus their attention on specialized terminology in order to have a qualitative translation. (342)

This approach to teaching focuses on attracting students, establishing a common communication ground with them and then moving on to the development of their practical speaking and translation skills.

Social network technology can well be applied to the learning environment. A group of researchers, Buga, Căpeneață, Chirasnel, Popa (2014), show how they managed to solve the problem of homework with their students by motivating them to post it in a Facebook group designed for them, in their paper entitled “Facebook in foreign language teaching – a tool to improve communication competences”:

If Facebook is so good in promoting daily communication it should be also profitable in the school environment. Our research, which was developed with a group of students in French and another one in English, consists in creating a Facebook account for a foreign language class where digital “home assignments” are displayed. Our aim is to stimulate more involvement in the learning activity, mainly in the writing assignments. The research that started in the fall of 2012 showed that Facebook has indeed a great potential as a means for teachers to reach their students and experiment with learning methods. Students who had never written their homework before, started responding on Facebook to a variety of communicative assignments. Our conclusion is that since using Facebook the foreign language class has progressed towards an environment of genuine communication. (93)

The experiment these teachers conducted shows that they have successfully established a common ground in communicating with their students and have made homework attractive to them. This proves that technology can be helpful and useful in the teaching and learning environment. Other papers such as that by Lungu (2013) support blended learning, which means using technology, combining the virtual environment with the process of teaching, in her case ESP at university level:

In higher education, it seems that the number of universities using blended courses is growing rapidly. Some estimates are that between 80 and 90% of the course will someday be hybrid [1]. [...] blended-learning pedagogical model for teaching and learning ESP successfully through a virtual environment requires indeed a real effort to redesign an ESP course in which face-to-face teacher-led classes, an online platform monitoring and the cooperation between the instructional designers and the software engineers contribute to the creation of a more effective final product. That is why we argue for the need for integrating technology into language courses to provide pedagogically sound and interesting lessons and a blended learning approach can certainly enrich the language learning experience of our students. (471)

This is a reason why MOOC courses have recently gained wide popularity. They also make use of technology and are used by Romanian learners as well.

In Romanian culture research focuses on understanding the psychology of the learners of a foreign language. We talk more about motivation, taking the backgrounds of learners into account in teaching centred on the students and their acquisition of various skills. Henter focuses on this in her paper *Affective factors in learning a foreign language* (2014: 373):

Acquisition of a foreign language represents an intensively studied issue, its psychological foundation being based on the individual differences of various learners. The learning process depends on a series of factors: cognitive factors (language aptitude, learning strategies), affective factors (attitudes, motivation, anxiety), metacognitive factors, and demographic factors.

Part of this work of motivation could be seen in using authentic teaching materials, such as authentic English texts. Through this method students are directly submerged in the respective culture. Ciornei and Dina (2015) focus on this issue: “The term authentic has been used as a reaction against the prefabricated patterns of the textbooks while authentic texts were the non-pedagogical texts used to help learners improve not only their communicative but also their cultural competences.” (274)

The authentic texts relate to the motivation of students to learn due to the incentives offered by globalization:

In close connection to the fact that, during the past few decades, globalization has grown significantly, more and more adults of different nationalities seek the help of English instructors because they want to find employment abroad, to communicate more effectively at work, to resort to overseas travels, or just to enjoy various types of social situations. In any of these cases, the English learners are highly motivated to study this particular subject. (Cozma 2015: 1209)

Using English in today’s world is for learners both a motivation and a necessity. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), an emerging global trend, can be useful for learning a foreign language or learning the cultural aspects related to the foreign language.

Starting from teaching and learning English with technology, we can easily understand where learning a foreign language using the many videos posted on youtube fits in. These video clips, which are sometimes as long as one hour, in the form of audiobooks, or in the form of video tutorials, can be of help for individual study. Students can complete and exercise their knowledge of a foreign language using these videos and audio materials. What is more, James Vincent writes about scientific evidence supporting that we can learn a foreign language in our sleep in 2014, in *Independent*. Indeed, there are even some audio materials on youtube to study during our sleep. These videos and audio materials can function as additional material to learning a foreign language. They do not seem to replace traditional teaching and studying ways. They can be used as an additional exercise. This is due to the fact that learning a foreign language is a complex process.

Meanwhile, teaching and learning with video materials, similar to youtube video and audio tutorials is gaining in popularity. This proves that visual and audio learning of a foreign language can be very efficient, similarly to situations when the students are there with the teacher in class.

What conditions have favoured the apparition of youtube language learning videos? They have to do with teaching foreign languages and other subjects in MOOCs and correspondence courses with audio material on CDs. Even language proficiency tests have an audio part students need to practice for.

The visual sense is as important in learning a foreign language as is the audio sense. The use of one sense only cannot help us learn a language completely. We need to perform various tasks, using our various senses. For this, audio learning of a foreign language in our sleep is not enough. We are not going to limit our communication capacity to words we learn during sleep. We need interaction. Classroom activities are based on interaction. An extreme example of interaction can be illustrated by Mass Online Courses. Another example is given by correspondence courses. When we learn using just one skill, the listening skill in the case of learning in our sleep, we will lack certain communication skills which we have not practiced.

2. The Impact of Mass Online Courses on Romanian Language Learners

MOOCs offer the possibility of taking part, virtually, in courses given by foreign universities. Subjects are classified by field of study. Romanians who know English at an advanced level can join

American Modern and Contemporary Poetry classes, such as the course of Alan Filreis, which has taken place annually since 2012 on Coursera platform. They can communicate with other learners worldwide, who are or not native speakers of English. They can watch videos of discussions between students and Filreis related to the poems studied in the course. Then they can check their knowledge through quizzes and essay assignments reviewed by their peers. The way such a course is based on communication is very clear: the interpretation of the poems is discussed right from the start, during the videos, among students and with the professor. The students are given the opportunity to express themselves on the forums and during the assignments. Communication has become a key word in today's teaching environment in Romania and this seems to be the case in Europe as well.

Another course, *Greek and Roman Mythology* (2012) presented a less open environment which nevertheless still allowed for the practice of English. The communication was not as free as in Filreis' class. The professor in this course delivered lectures alone in the videos, and used quizzes, forums, and essay assignments with peer review. Romanian speakers of English could test their knowledge of the language by studying and discussing topics with native English speakers and students with different mother tongues.

English Composition I (2013) offered students the opportunity to develop their writing skills in English. Creative writing courses are not part of Romanian teaching curricula, as they are in universities in the United States. With a focus on oral communication skills, Romanian students are more in touch with colloquial English than with formal English. This could be seen as an effect of the teachers trying to adapt their teaching style to their students' ages and interests. Young teenagers are often fond of communicating with their peers and are ready to practice their social skills. They tend to form groups and focus on the time spent with their groups of friends. Later, at university level, they become more interested in future career possibilities, partnerships and business communication with specialists in their field from abroad, if they are taught ESP.

An example of a language learning course on Coursera is Chinese for Beginners (2015). The teacher used Powerpoint slides and did not focus on learning Chinese characters. The course was designed to be very accessible to English speakers. Another course for English speakers was the one designed by edX platform, Spanish for English-speakers (2015). Such courses prove that English is a global language and opens the door to learning and studying other foreign languages on MOOC platforms.

The British Council Institute designed MOOC courses using FutureLearn Platform and the British Council from Bucharest encourages Romanian learners of English to sign up. The novelty of such courses, which cover cultural topics related to British language and culture, or writers such as Shakespeare, consists in the fact that they allow Romanian students to connect with native speaking teachers. Nothing is translated into Romanian. The native speaker as teacher is not something new to Romanian culture, yet Romanians can use MOOCs to practice even more efficiently, as the native speakers recorded in the videos will not pause to explain to them what they do not understand, and at the same time students can pause the videos, use the subtitles and look up the unfamiliar words. Students have a direct contact with the very culture of the language they are studying. The same can hold true for the rest of the MOOC courses.

The first Romanian MOOC, *Critical Thinking – Reason and Fair Play in Communication*, was designed by Maastricht School of Management from Romania in 2014 on iversity.org. It was subtitled in Romanian. Ulrich and Nedelcu 2005: 1542 argue that “Many analysts agree that MOOCs represent a good opportunity for blended learning revolution in universities”. Their study “focuses on students' motivation, course structure, types of assignments, sophistication of quantitative records on students' participation and quality of pedagogy” (2015: 1541). The conclusions on the application of MOOCs in Romania at this university are not, however, very favourable:

Both students and faculty members are familiar with MOOCs and most of them are interested to experience it at the personal level. Subjects welcome the idea of UB providing MOOCs, which could bring more visibility and prestige to our university and several benefits for students and adult learners, in general. [...] Although [...] benefits are anticipated, respondents think that UB is not yet prepared to provide such courses at a high quality level. Students underline the learning environments, while professors stress the teaching methodologies. Both categories of respondents are focused on content or problematic areas and only a minority is reflecting on the way MOOCs could be designed and delivered in order to provide quality learning experiences.

The cooperation needed for such courses is not present in the university presented in the research. Any learning environment needs cooperation teachers-students. If they do not relate and communicate, then the learning process is not achieved.

The real contact with the foreign culture is done through other courses rather than through those related to foreign languages specifically, whose topics range from literature, history, critical thinking or linguistics to analyzing sports, and psychology. We speak of interdisciplinarity at university level. The study of literature is now done using interdisciplinary approaches, from psychology to the analysis of culture. MOOCs offer this wide opening and students with an advanced grasp of English can benefit from further study. They can sample courses offered by prestigious universities in English speaking countries and improve their knowledge of culture.

At the same time, for foreign languages especially, such as Chinese (Coursera), Spanish (edX), or Dutch (FutureLearn), quizzes focus on grammar and the multiple choice questions presuppose knowledge of the exact structure. The exercise is similar to the multiple choice tests such as Cambridge and TOEFL with which Romanian students are very familiar. Through these exercises, learning foreign languages on MOOCs make it impossible not to focus on grammar, alongside other skills. Of course students will be encouraged to communicate in forums and in comments in the foreign language, yet grammatical structure will need to be given enough attention as well. On such platforms, Romanian students will not benefit from the grammar-translation method, at least not as they are used to, using their native language. In fact, they will be encouraged and prompted to use two different foreign languages, a second and a third language.

3. The Influence of EUROCOR Language Courses

EUROCOR Institute offers Romanians the possibility of studying various foreign languages at their own pace, through correspondence. Today's busy world leaves many of us without the possibility of successfully combining job schedules and the schedule of a foreign language class, EUROCOR tells its future students. They stress the comfortable way of learning a foreign language using their method. EUROCOR teaches German, English for business, Russian, Japanese, Spanish, and Italian by sending lessons grouped two by two in a series of copybooks sent by mail, either the whole package at once or on a monthly basis. All copybooks are accompanied by CDs where a native speaker reads everything written in the copybooks. Learners have an online account where they submit their homework, which is corrected by a teacher with whom they can communicate through the whole duration of the course. The exercises for homework always include sentences to translate, from Romanian to the foreign language and from the foreign language to Romanian, and a fill-in-the gaps (cloze) exercise, to complete with a tense, adverb, preposition, etc. The focus placed by these courses on grammar and grammar-translation methods does not necessarily make them traditional. The lessons are structured practically, based on situations learners can find themselves in when travelling to the respective country. The courses are designed for learners who intend to make practical use of the foreign language in a working environment and in everyday life: asking for directions, shopping, discussions with friends, and polite conversation in business contexts. A few notions about the culture of the respective country are also included, such as traditions, celebrations, values, and so on. These courses

combine the use of technology with traditional teaching methods in a way that is adapted to the needs of today's students. These courses are an example of successful adaptation to today's world and to today's students' needs.

4. The Influence of Tests on the Use of Audio Materials

Test components, such as listening, grammar and vocabulary, reading, speaking, and writing should reflect a balanced skill-set. Students no longer focus only on one skill alone, such as memorizing lists of terms, grammatical rules, or communication. Preparation for these types of tests requires students to exercise these skills during classes, which ensures a balanced development of their language abilities. One critique, however, which could be brought to these types of tests, could be that the practical use of language varies a lot from one context to another, meaning there is not always only one correct answer. Yet, the creator of the test needs to weigh all possible answers and leave it so that only one single answer is possible. Even so, language has many subtleties which sometimes cannot be covered, for example the use of English tenses, with present simple and continuous; sometimes, the use of a certain tense depends on the context that is not there on paper but is imagined by the person taking the test. Such tests can measure the practical use of language in context only to a certain point. Despite their limitations, these tests do measure the learner's capacity of attention, as in real life contexts we need to focus to avoid missing important details. This skill is tested in the audio part, as well as during the whole test, as students have a limited amount of time to finish. These tests seem more psychologically-oriented, as they test the students' capacity of attention in situations which they can encounter in the work environment. They will then need to understand and react spontaneously. As interpreters translate on the spot, the need for this skill is obvious, and even translators will face very tight deadlines within which they must accurately translate a large number of pages. These types of tests help students measure their capacity for adapting to modern work conditions and environments. The linguistic skills of students are tested in combination with other skills, such as their attention span, deducing meaning from context, reading and efficiently and then proving that they have understood, answering questions about the audio part, and filling in the gaps in cloze exercises. Some tests have a speaking part, which is used to check the easy adaptation and ability of a student to think on his own. Students are not tested only for linguistic knowledge, but also for their spontaneity and efficient communication under stress, just as when we try to ask directions in a foreign city or when we need to explain things quickly and clearly in a working environment abroad.

These multiple choice tests can look as if they divert attention from grammar, as students just check A, B, C, or D, yet their knowledge of the language, grammar and vocabulary can be reflected by recognizing the correct structures even if the students do not have to produce it themselves. In tests where there is a writing section they can be fully tested for their grasp of language, spontaneity, knowledge of the rules of essay writing and ability to understand and follow directions.

Most tests usually have limited duration. Students will need to take the test again in 2 or 3 years. This functions as a motivation to keep knowledge up to date and also as a way of their testing their knowledge when the time comes. The tests, if given when they leave the country for work or study, ensure that they can really adapt to a new environment, both due to their understanding of language and culture, as well as psychologically.

5. Conclusions

Youtube tutorials to learn a language can be popular as a result of responding to the necessities of learners. Learners need audio and visual materials to get used to the spoken language, which is essential since they will be dealing with real-life communication in various situations. MOOCs, EUROCOR courses, and tests such as Cambridge and TOEFL ask learners to develop the ability of

listening. While learning a foreign language totally in your sleep can be a controversial subject, it could help to some extent. It can help introduce students to vocabulary of the language, as well as to its grammatical structure. While grammar is not a matter of intuition, if in the audio material to be used during sleep there are some structures that students hear repeatedly they can use them spontaneously and then build other sentences using the same word order. Today students have a great variety of materials offered by the internet from around the world to use in order to achieve their purpose of learning a foreign language. Whether these materials are based on binaural beats such as the audio materials to study in your sleep, or on apparent interaction with the teacher in a tutorial video clip, they can only help students become more accustomed to the spoken language and improve their skills as listeners.

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