

# Technology Integrated Second Language Learning

M. Chandrasena Rajeswaran<sup>1</sup> Dr. S. Padmasani Kannan<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

English as second language (ESL) teaching and learning in the universities is a complex process. It takes into consideration the participants' individual differences and the environmental factors which have an impact on second language acquisition in general. When the learners are heterogeneous, by virtue of their mother tongue, aptitude, attitude, culture and tradition the teacher scouts for various means by which language learning can be made simple and easy. The present day university students are 'digital natives' (Palfrey and Grasser 2008); as such they are technology oriented. Their interest in the electronic media and modern gadgets allows the teachers to use them to assist language teaching in formal English classrooms and make learning lively and interesting. The research oriented university teachers have recorded many such technological interventions and their usefulness in the university ESL learning across the world. While submitting such instances, the author submits how technology is integrated in the Technical English classroom for learning and research in Dr. M.G.R. Educational and Research Institute University, Chennai.

**KEYWORDS:** heterogeneous, technology oriented, electronic media, modern gadgets, technology intervention, Technical English

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The communicative language teaching (CLT) in this decade is striding to a different level with the introduction of computers, and multimedia cell technology with which the present day teen agers and young adult students have grown up. These three have invaded not only the private lives of individuals but also the portals of higher learning across the world. With the changing world the classroom culture is also tied up. Teen agers and young adults occupy more than seventy per cent of the university learners. As Lemke(2003, 81) says teen agers are 'hetrochronous' subjects who desire to establish their identity in a 'wide range of expressive styles'(Legutke, (2012) that are consistent with the youth culture. But most of the ESL teachers do not take this aspect of the teen agers and young adult students seriously in communicative classrooms which give ample space for providing students with listening and viewing strategies. (Grau, 2009, p.171). For this reason, Legutke wants to redefine the classroom needs so that language exposure and language use are linked in a meaningful way.

The first year undergraduate students of any university would well fit into the category of 'digital natives' who have grown up with computers, and multimedia cell phone technology ((Palfrey and Grasser 2008);by virtue of their mother tongue they are heterogeneous; with their varied interests, aptitudes, attitudes and multiple intelligence, culture and tradition language teaching in the university is all the more complex. Considering their interest in the electronic media and modern gadgets, the teachers use them to assist language teaching in formal English classrooms and make English as second language learning a lively and interesting process.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The interactionist theory regards language is better learnt when imitated and modelled. Further it advocates interaction among the non-native speakers of English and in the absence of native speaker, the teacher being the contact person and resource person, the teacher needs to engage interactional modification to promote target language acquisition. Given to the nature of classroom interaction, as the one that has to be initiated by teacher herself in the form of wh questions that could coax the students to answer at the least in phrases, if not in complete sentences, the teacher herself needs to be communicative to motivate the overt learners to be interactive in the target language. What these students need most is "extensive authentic practice in class participation, such as taking part in discussions, interacting with peers and professors, and asking and answering questions"(Lazaraton, 2001).

Lightbown and Spada (1993) the exponents of interactionist theory opine that the language to which learners are exposed is crucial to language development, in particular; language or the input that is

modified to suit the capabilities of the learners is a crucial element in the language acquisition process. Interactionists agree that comprehensible input is essential to language acquisition but are most concerned with how the input is made comprehensible. Lightbown and Spada summarise that interactional modification makes input comprehensible and hence promotes acquisition (1993:p.30).

In short, the relationship between acquisition process and interactional modifications (or negotiation of meaning) is a logical one (Crookes and Gass,1993a, 1993b:Long1985). When the learner's linguistic expressions are not clear the teacher maintains and supports the interaction by expanding on the learners' utterances to help them "receive an accurate linguistic model of what they intend to say"(Ellis1990). "When teachers cannot provide this kind of input they will rely heavily on audio and video tapes or for reading on newspapers..." (Rivers, W. M. 1987)

Learning by observing others directly ("modelling") which has mainly been studied from a social-cognitive perspective (Bandura 1977, 1986) supports learning from "modelling examples". In the absence of interactions with native speakers, and lack of practice in using the target language with the gambits and pauses, audio- video recordings are quite helpful (Weyers, J. R. 1999); live news broadcasts, weather reports etc., enhance the vocabulary of EFL learners; listening to them the learners develop their listening skills (Brinton, D.and Gaskill, W (1978)

## 3. AUTHENTIC VIDEO

Bacon & Finnemann,1990; Liontas,1992) have said that authentic video is beneficial in providing natural, content rich samples of the target language; Richardson and Scinicariello (1989) praise the TV programmes as reflecting current linguistic changes more effectively than printed sources. They motivate the ESL learners to listen and observe well because of their "sensory impact" (Wen, 1989, p.246; Beeching,1982;Terrell,1993). Video, by nature, is filled with valuable extra linguistic clues that aid comprehension; it precludes the language anxiety which usually affects learning. ESL/ EFL learners observe non- verbal behaviour of the model speaker and the types of exclamations and fill in expressions that are used; furthermore they see the live demonstration of how people initiate and sustain a conversational exchange, and how they terminate an interactive episode (Keller and Warner 1979).

Research shows that exposure to visual stimuli increases students' comprehension and retention of lexical items (Snyder & Colon,1988) and that visual exposure, when coupled with an audio component, significantly increases students' comprehension of a video text (Altman, 1989; Baltova, 1994). Furthermore, exposure to video programming has shown a significant increase in the learners' listening comprehension (Secules, Herron, and Tomasello,1992), Authentic video has even been shown to inspire self-confidence and, as a result, students exposed to it report feeling fewer inhibitions about

using their second language (Terrell, 1993). Weyers (1999) has reported his empirical research conducted in the college of Charleston, on the effect of authentic video on the communicative competence of his students showed positive results like building confidence to generate comprehensible output with its high levels of target language input samples from the native speakers.

#### 4. ENGLISH CLASSICS/ FILM DVD

Considering the literatures cited it was decided to show the famous English classics like 'Pride and prejudice' and 'Oliver Twist' to the ESL students during the practical sessions in Dr. M. G. R. Educational and Research Institute University. The response was overwhelming. Initially the lessons were time consuming, both in preparation of the hand outs on the story line incorporating the required vocabulary and providing students with necessary in-class explanation of the scenes, the work was rewarded with enthusiastic observation by even the weak students and in terms of their vocabulary enhancement. Some type of supplementary material, e.g., comprehension questions, transcripts or cloze passages, is needed to accompany video or audio presentations to facilitate students' comprehension. Such extended activities help to motivate and encourage the students to comprehend and imitate, to have their inputs modified to comprehensible output.

Moreover, observational learning of cognitive tasks requires the model to somehow externalize their cognitive actions, for example, by thinking aloud, or writing down the actions, or they will not be observable for the learner (Collins et al. 1989). Therefore, in this sense, asking students to write the review or about the characters or the story in general helps them to scaffold their writing ability; the identified content is readily developed into dialogues to present as role plays.

#### 5. COMMERCIALLY PREPARED CDS

Another technology aid that came handy was the commercially prepared CDs available along with the books like 'English pronunciation in use'. The CD presented with the said book was quite helpful in helping the students to listen and understand the native speaker's pronunciation. The market is also filled with educational CDs which have recorded the speeches of famous personalities like Dr. Kalam, Kiran Bedi and the like. One of the greatest advantages of using the famous speeches like that of 'The girl who silenced the world' in the classroom concerns the issue of environmental hazards and the related vocabulary.

Blatchford (1973) has noted down that the consistent use of the newspaper in the ESL classroom helps students recognise the vocabulary on the newspaper columns with that from their understanding and repertoire and the vocabulary is recycled in their sentences. The classroom observation confirmed the same phenomenon occurring in the use of video clippings of famous speeches. One payoff for the work of transcribing such speeches and also for the numerous explanations of vocabulary at the beginning of the classes in the repeated use of contextualized vocabulary. This recycling of vocabulary takes the pressure off both the students and the teacher because nothing occurs perfect the first time. If students are held responsible for a minimum number of words per listening and vocabulary is quizzed regularly, the natural recycling process can be further complemented.

#### 6. RADIO COMMERCIALS AND NEWS BROADCAST

Apart from their ability to keep student frustration level low during learning, radio commercials with their brilliant sound effect help the students visualise the setting of the dialogue. The length of radio commercials is quite often less than sixty seconds and hence they attract students concentration which is known to last only for a short period. The redundancy nature of the commercials gives scope for opportunities to understand certain phrases and repeated vocabulary. Students gain self-confidence as they listen to them and answer the simple comprehension exercises; the cloze dictation, true/false, multiple choice, short answer questions facilitate comprehensible output from the learners. Lastly the students could be asked to perform a role play for the situation in the commercial, using the vocabulary they listened to. Moreover, radio commercials will give the students the

real life picture of the world around, providing a broader knowledge of the language usage. "There is something to be said for the use of other types of live broadcasts such as interviews, commercials, songs and other radio and television programs which can be taped, transcribed and supplemented with the types of exercises detailed above. Unlike news broadcasts, some of these materials are suitable for repeated playing and can become part of a permanent listening comprehension library" (Brinton, D. 1978, p. 412)

#### 7. MOBILE PHONE

Another useful technology that can make a formal classroom into a lively interactive one is the present day mobile phones or smart phones with their wonderful applications. Madhuri Gokhale (2011) gives a detailed account of how her students learnt language through collaborative learning with the help of cell phones. Apart from their ability to pose as a ready reckoner- language resource mobile phones also help in audio- video recording during the role play performance, giving scope for teacher and students self and peer retrospective assessment for enhancing communicative skills with repeat performance.

At the home front, in Dr. M.G.R. Educational and Research Institute University, where the author is a teacher, had to teach the engineering students 'describing objects', as part of their syllabus and her research. She took the topic 'Mobile phone'. Firstly, the class was plunged into a brain-storming session to bring out the possible and related vocabulary for describing a mobile phone. Amazingly certain students were able to write more than a hundred words. Then they were asked to write a paragraph, giving one sentence definition of mobile phone as introduction, then its working principle, appearance, inner components, software, advantages and disadvantages and finally a conclusion. 'Wh' and yes or no questions the teacher asked were to organise their ideas in a paragraph. The writing assignment gave them an insight into the gap between their requirement and their ability. The vocabulary gave them the strength to construct the paragraph; then as the post task role play between a sales representative and customers was enacted; an audio CD which had a dyad describing a pen drive was played. On listening to it the students had a model on which their role play was to be written and spoken. The audio CD helped them to 'conceptualise' their ideas and their ideas were 'formulated' into writing a paragraph and situational role play. Finally their writing was presented orally and the scripted role play was enacted and recorded for self and peer review; the oral presentation and role play performance were the 'articulation' (Levelt, 1989) of their learnt language.

#### 8. ROLE PLAY CDS AND VIDEO RECORDING WITH SMART PHONES

The author carries on her research in the Technical English classroom to enhance the oral communication skills of engineering students through role plays. Role plays are considered to be effective communication enhancement tools in ESL classrooms. Their efficacy in teaching the nuances of interpersonal communication and academic language function was under study. So scripted and situational role plays were administered to students. Despite the teacher's elaborate introduction and explanation the students were quite hesitant to participate in the role plays. But when CD modelling interpersonal communication (available with Dutt, et al, A Course in Communication Skills, 2008) was played in the lab, the students volunteered in pairs to take roles in the role plays. Thus their Basic Interpersonal Communication skills and Academic Language Functions skills were encouraged and groomed for better placement prospects. Their language inhibition and anxiety were under control because of audio modelling. Then their performance was video recorded in their smart phones. This kind of exercise gave them insight into their performance to identify their verbal and nonverbal behaviour. In retrospective reflection they could indulge in self- analysis and peer correction for improvement in communication.

#### 9. INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND TECHNOLOGY

According to Krashen (1991), once input is comprehended, it is processed in the brain as intake. Krashen's input hypothesis suggests that the quality and quantity of output (speech) is "crucially

dependent on the quality and quantity of comprehensible input the learners process" (Terrell, 1993, p. 18). As such, it is logical to propose that an increase in the quantity and quality of the input should result in a similar increase in the quantity and quality of students' output; The quality of students' output, refers to their communicative competence in transmitting messages understandable and intelligible to their teacher and peers.

Cognitive load theory requires the learner to pay attention to the relevant aspects of the modelled behaviour, and "selective attention to one or more factors is, therefore, one of the crucial sub-functions in observational learning" (Bandura 1986 p.51). Thus, the theories and approaches in English language teaching have been used in association with the technology to make the learning processes interesting and to get content or the academic text cognitively stored in the brain of the students for recollection at a later time in a similar context.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The positive indications in the use of technology are a sure motivation for the teachers and learners to include them in the second language learning. Thus integration of technology in the communicative language class offers live language presentations which bring in an element of proximal environment in the classroom; it ensures consistency and perseverance in the instructional procedure. Many students initially viewed the famous speeches as difficult to understand. In our experience we found that it was only by providing the students with a set of procedure, and their repeat performance in accordance, we were able to convince them that they could understand live language. Thus, it is emphasized that pre-listening questions, cloze transcriptions, and various types of comprehension questions are essential in using audio materials for listening comprehension.

Secondly, the teacher needs to show enormous perseverance to receive the outcome. Initially, some students, particularly the less proficient may claim to have understood nothing at all. The language decoding process would get confounded by unfamiliar cultural contexts, and frequent cultural transcriptions are necessary to clarify the content of a particular cinema or news item. In addition, the vocabulary load is burdening at first and it may seem that too much time is being spent at the word level. Thus, the teacher should strive to maintain a supportive atmosphere for the students' collaborative efforts to learn the language. The peer groups' suggestions and corrections towards individual and collective learning should also be encouraged to harvest the benefits of technology interventions in the second language learning.

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