2014

Student Created Videos in a Spanish Language Course: Promoting Active Learning

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Recommended Citation

виртуальный мир: вести дебаты, устраивать ролевые игры, выставки, спектакли и тому подобное. Асинхронные инструменты, такие как электронная почта, блоги и совместная разработка вики также играют важную роль. Здесь пользователи могут создавать, редактировать и обмениваться текстами. Эти технологии открывают возможность участвовать в мероприятиях, которые позволяют получить осязаемый результат. Последние исследования показали, что без практики языка и без получения обратной связи мультилингвальное образование не будет продуктивным.

Таким образом, использование технологий в мультилингвальном образовании позволяет учащимся, у которых нет достаточно возможностей для общения на языке, который они изучают, продуктивно общаться с другими носителями изучаемого языка.

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STUDENT CREATED VIDEOS IN A SPANISH LANGUAGE COURSE: PROMOTING ACTIVE LEARNING

Active learning is broadly defined as a learning context in which the student takes charge rather than being a passive receiver. Teaching practices in the foreign language classroom can be enhanced by incorporating student created videos in order to promote this active learning. Based upon a case study of three activities involving student created videos to learn Spanish in an undergraduate curriculum, we identify key characteristics of active learning, such as the following: applying learning to the real world, contributing to and benefiting from a connected learning network, moving toward autonomy, and lastly, applying self-assessment as part of critical analysis. Each of the activities addresses course objectives for varying levels of language proficiency. A reflective analysis describes the shifting role of the student from passive receiver to creator and the resulting benefits for foreign language acquisition. Challenges involved in the design and implementation of the student created videos are also presented.

Key words: active learning, interactive teaching, higher education, L2 instruction, student created videos

Introduction

As the American Council for Foreign Languages states in its «21st Century Skills Map for World Languages» document [8], the language classroom has changed together with its students. Among other things, the Council explains that the emphasis should no longer be on the instructor, but rather on the student as «creator» or «doer», that we should move from homework assignments to the creation of artifacts that can be shared with a larger audience, and that technology should be integrated into instruction to enhance learning whenever possible. Furthermore, technology itself has changed in the past five years and most students now own sophisticated gadgets such as a smartphone, which can be used at a moment's notice, easily and without additional cost. Instructors need to take advantage of this situation and transform their pedagogy so that these tools can serve a beneficial purpose, from taking pictures for storytelling creations to recording voice memos for improving speech patterns. These changes correspond to a movement towards active learning, and in this paper, we will see how video creation is part of this larger framework. To achieve this active learning, we must be innovative in our teaching practices when using digital tools. It is also important to remember that the utilization of new tools while retaining old teaching methods will not improve pedagogy, and may be even detrimental to student learning.

This paper discusses how the language classroom can be enhanced by incorporating student created videos with different formats and objectives to promote active learning. We believe that these types of activities can not only increase actual language acquisition, but serve other purposes as well, such as enhancing student motivation, engagement, enjoyment, and creativity while fostering collaboration. The activities have the additional benefit of contributing to proficiency in the creation of digital media, a goal that is not part of the language classroom in itself but will nevertheless serve the students well in building skills for professional preparedness in an increasingly digital world.

The pedagogical objective described in this paper is the design of an optimal learning environment to promote active learning through the effective integration of student created videos. We include a description of three different activities in a Spanish language undergraduate program within a liberal arts curriculum, which will lead to a reflective analysis of teaching practices.

Background Discussion of video use in FL classroom

A 2013 report from the Pew Internet and American Life project by Lenhart [6] on «how teens use technology» states that 38% of U.S. students take pictures or record videos with their phones for class assignments. The same report adds that 68% of young adult Americans in the 18-29 age range record video with their phones. «If instructors in higher education consider student created videos as useful prior learning, they are able to bring about a harmonization of technology tools, teaching, and course content» [4, 102].

There is a general misperception about millenials in the USA with respect to technology, namely that they are highly confident and comfortable with the use of digital tools. The inference is that they are skilled in the use of such tools in a classroom setting. Our observations of freshmen classrooms have shown, however, that students are ill-equipped for using these tools in academic contexts. Thus, even though students find it relatively easy to create videos with their smartphones, the effective use of this tool has to be modeled and anchored to concrete learning scenarios.

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is becoming increasingly common in the foreign language curriculum at the higher education level. Recent research studies in MALL have reported sound pedagogical applications and benefits for students [1, 76].

In the Spanish language classroom environment observed in this study, the most important variable in active learning was the student's role in using video for foreign language learning. The paradigm shift in the teaching methodology lies in transforming the student from a passive receiver to a creator of learning materials for self-regulation. Without denying the effectiveness of videos as instructional materials, adding the component of student created videos to enhance specific aspects of language learning, such as fluency, creates fertile ground for active learning.

In the next case study section, we will describe three activities in a Spanish learning classroom, that uses a constructivist approach to promote active learning. According to Gray (as cited in Wang, 2011) this takes effect when students are «engaged in meaning-making inquiry, action, imagination, invention, interaction, hypothesizing, and personal reflection» [9, 276]. Importantly, these student created video materials are purposefully designed in collaborative settings. This allows students to apply metacognitive strategies in applying their knowledge of Spanish and constructing language meaningfully.

Case study description of activities to foster active learning

The activities described here are part of a sequence of studies in the Spanish program at our university. As stated in the course description, there is a great value for integrating technology into foreign language acquisition and using it to spotlight the development of communicative competence: «The Spanish Program is designed to foster students' linguistic development and to provide a broad knowledge of Spanish, Latin American, and US Latino cultures. Language courses emphasize communicative competence and oral proficiency, but all skill areas (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) are developed. Technology and multimedia tools (DVDs, CDs, Internet sources) enhance language learning.» Our program consists of a variety of courses, which range from beginner level to advanced courses, including literature and culture. The language-based courses include the already mentioned beginner (first year, two semesters); intermediate (second year, two semesters); advanced grammar and composition; conversation (either can be chosen for the third year level, two semesters each); and lastly, more specialized courses, such as phonetics or linguistics, which are usually taken by Spanish majors.

The three activities we have highlighted here emphasize the sequence that students need to follow in order to master the language. Thus they belong to different courses and levels, but are also scaffolded with a variety of activities, from more controlled to more creative. These include tasks performed in class (with the help of the teacher at all times) and, in the last case, tasks completed as homework by more advanced students. All of the activities took place in the school year 2012-2013. The three courses being described had eighteen, twenty, and ten students respectively.

Activity 1: Scripted conversational practice for beginners (1st semester), using student-generated smartphone videos, not graded

This was a first-year university Spanish language course. Because smartphones are ubiquitous, the instructor decided to use them as tools to enhance more traditional pair-work assignments. This activity was performed approximately three times during the semester. The primary goal was to practice new vocabulary or a new grammatical structure (such as the past tense) by creating short dialogues based upon a provided template. One such exercise is described below.

In this exercise, the students were required to create a dialogue, practicing the vocabulary for school-related subjects. Working in pairs, students wrote a script using the following template:

- What are your courses this semester?

- My courses this semester are _____, _____ and _____

- Which one is your favorite course?

- My favorite course is _____

These dialogues were short enough for students to memorize and to practice not only vocabulary but also fluency, since this may actually outweigh pronunciation accuracy when non-native speakers are judged by native speakers [5, p. 2227]. Once the students had written the lines, the instructor went around the room, listening to each pair and making sure there were no mistakes. Students had a chance to practice their dialogue for a few more minutes, and were then instructed to go outside of the classroom and record the lines using their smartphones. Although some students did not own a smartphone, there were enough for all the pairs. The student holding the camera would ask the other student (who was being filmed) the questions. In the final video, you hear both students, but see only the student who answers. This eliminated the need for a third student to hold the camera. Once the students were satisfied with their recordings, they sent them to the instructor via e-mail. The instructor put together a simple video of the best students' clips, using Windows Movie Maker and adding subtitles to the students' words. The program offers easy templates for this purpose, which make the transition between clips look very professional with little effort. The final product can be seen at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCbmmsxsxjw

The videos created in this way were later uploaded to the class website so that students could watch them as many times as desired to review the vocabulary for their exam. The instructor has also used these videos in other classes to present new material or review vocabulary. Because they are publicly shared through YouTube, they can in fact be used by any instructor who may want to review these items.

The key elements promoting active learning in this case were the students' complete immersion in the activity, their transformation from passive receivers of information to active participants, and, when compared to the traditional pair-work activity that it replaced, the fact that the students not only took the assignment more seriously, but also enjoyed it much more. The use of the camera also added an element of fun and the possibility for creation and engagement.

At the end of the semester, students offered the following anonymous responses to the question «What did you like most about the course?» A sample of their responses which may be related to these types of activities follows:

- *The use of alternative ways to learning, such as videos, jeopardy, etc.*
- *I liked that the professor got the class very involved.*
- *It was fun.*
- *She made learning Spanish fun and interactive.*
- *I liked that we got to use our phones and computers to do activities to learn. It made it more fun and interesting to learn rather than just writing in our notebooks.*

Although they did not directly talk about the video creation in itself, their comments show that active learning activities such as the one described were perceived by the students as making the class more engaging and enjoyable.

In spite of the fact that the instructor did not specifically measure the learning that took place in this activity, she did observe that for most students, this exercise consolidated their knowledge of vocabulary related to classes, as well as their ease at answering in Spanish, as evidenced by their test results and their responses to in-class questions.

Activity 2: Vocabulary and grammar practice for beginners (2nd semester) using student participation with Swivl and smartphone, not graded

The instructor was provided with a Swivl (http://www.swivl.com/) by the manufacturer so that she could test it with her students. The Swivl is a stand for an iPhone or iPad. It moves automatically, following the signal from a «marker» equipped with a microphone, which can be worn by the instructor or by the students creating the video. It is designed primarily for lecture capture within the context of the real classroom. The advantage of the Swivl is that there is no need for a camera operator. The instructor created several videos using the device for a second-semester Beginner's Spanish university course. In some videos, students were asked to prepare questions for her to answer. The students then lined up in a row. Each one approached the teacher, asked the question, received her answer, and was then followed by the next student. For other projects with the Swivl, the students, working in groups of five, three or two, prepared different scripted dialogues or skits that were recorded later for posting on the class's website.

A description of one of those skits is as follows:

For this activity, the goal was to review the imperfect form, vocabulary associated with childhood and youth, and some terminology relating to the seasons. The class was separated into three groups of five students each. Each group was assigned a slightly different task:

Group 1: Talk about activities you did when you were in elementary school.

Group 2: Talk about activities you did in high school.

Group 3: Talk about activities you did as a child in the winter.

Group 4: Talk about activities you did as a child in the summer.

Each student was to write a sentence about their group's topic, with each student mentioning something different. They also had to compose a final sentence that would summarize the topic in a nice or funny way, and all of the students had to say this sentence together at the end of the skit (this activity is based on one of the techniques of the «Rassias Method» [7, p. 216], which consists of five sentences or verbs that are acted out and built in a way that they tell a story, with some modifications). This was also done as an in-class exercise. The instructor went around the room, correcting all the sentences and listening to the students in order to detect any pronunciation mistakes requiring correction and practice before the recording. Once the groups were ready, the recordings were made in the class. In a sense, therefore, this was very similar to a traditional in-class presentation. Because the Swivl moves with the «marker», which is also the microphone, students would say their sentence and pass the «marker» to the next student when they were done speaking. After the fifth student spoke, the «marker» would be passed to the student in the middle, and all five students would say the concluding sentence at the same time. The remaining students listened to their classmates. After each skit was presented, there was a brief discussion about the words used and possible interpretations. Most of the groups made the last sentence somewhat humorous, and the students watching particularly enjoyed that aspect.

Part of the beta testing of the Swivl involved storage in the Cloud using a program called Kaltura. The recordings were automatically uploaded with the Swivl iPhone app. The instructor then used the link created by Kaltura for each video to post it to the class webpage. The clear advantage over a traditional presentation is that not only could the students in that class use the link for reviewing vocabulary, the instructor could also use it for other subsequent courses. This activity was also not graded, since the main objective was to have students gain confidence in their ability to speak the language and to do so in a motivating and engaging manner.

The key elements promoting active learning in this activity were the focus on collaboration among the group members to create a «plot» for their presentation that was entertaining and funny, as well as accurate. As with the first activity described, students were completely immersed in the creation of their skit. They helped one another with vocabulary and pronunciation to ensure that the group would do a good job in front of the class (and in the recording).

At the end of the semester, students offered the following anonymous responses to the question «What did you like most about the course?»:

- *The instructor makes learning the Spanish language a pleasure.*
- *It was a great combination of assignments to help different types of learners.*
- *The class time.*
- *The instructor made the class interesting and kept my attention.*
- *I liked how she always made the class interesting and had us do a lot of group work which helps me learn better rather than just always listening to lectures.*
- *The instructor has very good and effective teaching tactics.*
- *The teacher used technology very well and incorporated different aspects of technology to make the class more interesting.*
- *This class allowed you learn at your own pace and the activities were able to be done to help you learn. I enjoyed being able to do the different activities for each chapter. It allowed for you to emphasize the writing, talking, and listening exercises. It allowed me to use my strengths to better be able understand spanish, as well as stimulate my learning.*

These answers show that the activities designed for more active learning were thoroughly enjoyed by most students. Although there is a place for lectures, students indeed prefer activities in which they can show high level of participation as opposed to «listening to lectures».

In this activity, the instructor observed that students seemed to practice the flow and pronunciation of their sentences with greater self-regulation than they did in a regular activity or even for an exam, which required mere memorization. Self-regulated learning was displayed in at least two different ways: 1) with no prompting they included additional cycles of rote learning practice, and 2) made the instructor aware of their ability to check for readiness before video recording. Even when working toward a common learning goal, each student developed his or her own learning strategies.

Activity 3: Unscripted conversational practice (6th semester) using student created videos uploaded to YouTube, graded

This was a second-semester, third-year level Spanish conversation class. Students were asked to create YouTube accounts, which had to be made public for the duration of the semester. Students were assigned to address different topics, such as a favorite movie. They were to research the topic in Spanish and create a short video (1-2 minutes) of themselves talking about the topic. They were instructed to refrain from reading, to add some of the new vocabulary discussed in class and their own vocabulary findings from their research, and to use transitional words. Students recorded the videos using their own laptops, although they could have done so with their smartphones. They recorded directly from the YouTube page, as this is one of the options.

Once the videos were published to YouTube, students were instructed to embed the link in a class webpage created with Google Sites, which works in a similar way to a wiki. The instructor and all of the students had permission to edit.the page. The week after the videos were uploaded, each student had to select two of their classmates and create a one-

minute video response to their video. This response also had to be embedded under the main video in the Google Site.

This was a graded activity, and students were evaluated based upon a twenty-point rubric. The rubric considered vocabulary use, fluency (including transitional words), comprehension, and pronunciation. For each video created, including responses, students received a grade according to the rubric. They also received specific comments. Both the grade and the comments were collected in a single document, which was shared with students. An example is shown below:

Timestamp	Número de vídeo	Uso? del vocabulario	Fluidez	Comprensión	Acento	Comentarios para mejorar
3/13/2013 20:29:57	Dos	5	5	5	5	ESTA semana SE MURIÓ ¡Exelente!
3/14/2013 12:10:28	Respuesta a Karia	4	5	4	5	tú tenías sus CENIZAS (no entendí la palabra que tú usaste)
3/14/2013 12:17:45	Respuesta a Erin	4	5	5	5	- historia muy CÓMICA - algo como ESTO - por UNA isla - mi madre PENSÓ - pero ME DOLIÓ LA CABEZA TRES DÍAS

At the end of the semester, students commented anonymously the following to the question «What did you like most about the course?» Here are some of their responses:

- *I liked that her teaching involved a lot of online technology. This allowed us to be able to become more technologically savvy while at the same time opening us up to be able to converse with people from Spain.*
- *The professor's teaching methods are new, fun, and exciting!*
- *I loved all of the activities we did throughout the class, for example the service learning because it helped us with out Spanish as well as helping other people. All of the other activities really helped me learn new things about Spanish and the culture of Spain.*
- *I liked that she made things interesting and related to current topics in our lives. It was nice that she provided feedback on our Twitter accounts and the videos we recorded.*

From these comments, we observe that students indeed enjoyed using the technology and that they felt it helped them learn the material better. The advantage of using YouTube is that the students own their recordings, and can choose to make them private or delete them altogether at any point.

Based on the instructor's observation and the student self-reports, it was clear that the degree of enthusiasm displayed in activity 3 was less than that expressed in activity 1 and activity 2. This may have been because activity 3 was graded, unlike the other two activities.

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Active learning can be viewed as «action, imagination, invention, interaction» [9, p. 276]. These four factors of learning were especially exemplified in one student's end of course reflection. This student described the challenge he faced in finding the right balance between improvisation and clear structure when creating a video in response to the given prompts. In arriving at the final product, he set a goal for himself to present spontaneously without the use of a script. However, during the recording process, he discovered that he had to correct his mistakes several times, which came in the way of achieving spontaneity. Through repeated practice, this student built a mental script that helped him create the video. Guided by the rubric, the student integrated his own criteria to arrive at a final draft that met with his satisfaction. In addition to creating his video, he was required to respond to at least two peers. This response task reinforced the process of video creation combined with asynchronous peer response.

Because these videos were graded, the instructor was able to observe and document that 80% of the students in the course did improve in their fluency appreciably. Another 10% showed minimal improvement in fluency, while the last 10% showed no improvement.

Discussion

Active learning is broadly defined as a learning context in which the student takes charge rather than being a passive receiver. The activities described above are a crucial part of a larger curricular framework that has been designed to learn Spanish in incremental stages from beginning to advanced levels. Although this study focuses on the student-created videos to enhance fluency, it would be dangerous to view this activity in isolation. While the use of videos created by students was common in all the activities, the purpose of the incremental build-up was to meet the Spanish learning program's goal of achieving communicative competency and oral proficiency.

In applying the principles of the learning spiral, recursive loops of initiation-response-feedback reinforce learning in these tasks focused on communicative competency. The process is further strengthened when students are empowered to play the role of willing participants in the response feedback interactions. Thus the instructor is not the sole authority figure for arriving at the correct answer. This change in dynamic, which is evident in all three activities, enables the instructor's modeling of active learning.

Although videos have been used effectively in FL classrooms, the usefulness of student created videos as a powerful tool for active and cooperative learning needs further exploration [3, p. 273].

The use of student created videos for Spanish language learning offered three advantages: 1) using video production tools that were already available to the students avoided additional cost or access issues; 2) encouraging students to create their practice videos initiated a paradigm shift in their role, from consumer to active and willing contributor; and 3) building a learning design resulted in the empowerment of students to generate a cooperative learning methodology that extended beyond the space and duration of the classroom sessions.

Motivating students to create their own learning material under the instructor's guidance and then using the digital materials for self-assessment and peer learning was a crucial step in modeling the principles of active learning.

In alignment with program objectives, these three activities developed communicative competence and oral proficiency from first semester to sixth semester by incrementally building language skills, while employing a common theme of video-created student materials.

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The use of student created videos for conversational practice or vocabulary building was only one teaching component within a programmatic framework. For example, an overall pedagogical plan that was focused on vocabulary building as a learning outcome included a diagnostic for gauging language fluency as well as practice using cycles of peer feedback. These were combined with cognitive scaffolding that consisted of instructor feedback and continued practice with peers.

Students were provided with a variety of opportunities to demonstrate learning. For first-year students, these included in-class pair and group work, written tasks, blogs about everyday experiences, listening exercises through podcasts, and quizzes and exams. For the conversation class in the sixth semester, such opportunities also included reading about current events and culture, reviewing grammar in written and oral exercises, and even non-traditional activities such as using Twitter, conducting service learning activities, and watching a Mexican soap opera. The students also completed reflection exercises about all of these activities. The use of a multi-modal approach to teach vocabulary building and conversational exercises to enhance fluency exposed students to different ways of achieving the same learning outcome. The key elements of active learning evident in the three activities are:

Applying learning to the real world: Language learning cannot be achieved without relating it to real-life situations in a meaningful way. The student created videos in activity 1, 2, and 3 integrated topics that were relevant to the student's day-to-day life. As the students talked in Spanish about their favorite movie, their families, or their living arrangements in the university, they connected with personal experiences, and thereby the learning of a foreign language took on greater meaning.

Contributing to and benefiting from a connected learning network: As students created the videos and shared them in the Learning Management system within their class, they were in fact contributing to and benefiting from a connected learning network.

Moving toward autonomy: Activities 1 and 2 involved greater dependence on the instructor when designing the videos for language practice. In activity 3, which was conducted in the sixth semester, the students' increased competence in Spanish resulted in less dependence on the instructor. This signaled that the students were ready to «take charge of their learning».

Scope for self-assessment: By being required to post the videos they created for their speaking practice, students learned how to apply self-assessment as part of critical analysis. Here is one student example: the student observed in her final class reflection that her videos helped her become more fluent in Spanish because she was forced to look for appropriate words to communicate clearly about everyday situations. When she practiced several times through video creation, she spoke with greater ease and improved pronunciation. She reported that she forced herself to learn more difficult linguistic expression, keeping in mind the relevance for this learning in future contexts. Driving herself to aim higher resulted in increased vocabulary.

To concretely identify the aspects of active learning in the three activities described above, this discussion will focus on specific characteristics of active learning listed by Bonwell & Eison – 1) going beyond passive listening, 2) improvement of student involvement, 3) greater emphasis on skills development than information transformation, and 4) exploration of attitudes and values [2, p. 2].

In the case study, all of the activities using student created videos enabled student involvement to go beyond that of a passive receiver. The very fact that the students created videos to practice their spoken Spanish in different scenarios exemplified an ability to take charge of their learning. The development of skills exceeded the

transmission of information about language fluency, as students not only practiced their Spanish, but also had to learn how to make an effective video in terms of clarity of speech, image, background noise, etc. In addition, students demonstrated higher-order thinking in different ways, such as problem solving through collaboration with their partners to arrive at dialogue-building in Spanish.

Student involvement was increased. Students had to arrive at Spanish constructs in the presence of the instructor. One specific example for how pair and peer work led to «communities of practice» involved the production of a video created in the sixth semester, the topic of which was suggestions for high school students wanting to apply to college. The secondary goal was the use of sentences in the subjunctive. One of the student-created videos was shared by the instructor on Twitter. Another educator, who teaches high school Spanish, liked it so much that she used it to help her own students learn about the topic and review the subjunctive. Sharing of teaching practices by instructors from two different institutions, and the ripple effect to the students led to «communities of practice».

Correlating motivation with grades assigned for each activity provided some insight into students' exploration of «values and attitudes». The degree of engagement demonstrated by students in activity 1 and activity 2 was greater than that of the students in activity 3, as evidenced by their comments on the course evaluations. They frequently used the words «fun» and «enjoyable» to describe the activities done in class, and this was also observed by the instructor for activities 1 and 2. Given that activity 1 and activity 2 were not graded, whereas activity 3 was, it is natural to assume a direct correlation between grading of the activity and motivation. The pedagogical thinking behind not embedding formal assessment in the first two activities is that students were exploring the creation of videos for the first time in a formal foreign language academic context, and therefore needed to be given sufficient opportunity to practice language in multiple ways. By the time they reached the sixth semester, students had had enough experience with video production for language practice and were ready for formal grading. It will be useful to further study the effect of grading on engagement or to find alternate ways of designing the activity so that it does not hinder student engagement.

In designing a suitable learning environment that enabled students to develop as active learners, there were three primary challenges:

Differing levels of language proficiency: The students in activity 3 in the sixth semester class were a heterogeneous group with varying degrees of Spanish proficiency. When the students gave each other feedback on the videos, students with low proficiency received a lower level of peer response because their Spanish was difficult to comprehend. This proved to be a great challenge because it affected the overall quality of the peer response.

Student comfort level: The plan was to use student created video as an important aspect of active learning. Even though the lack of grading placed less stress on the student, having to demonstrate learning in the presence of peers and through video still posed an emotional obstacle for some students. Instructors should be aware that some students may feel uncomfortable about being recorded on video.

Video creation and privacy issues: No students reported any problem with the use of video production tools to perform their course activities. Nevertheless, instructors must be cognizant of privacy issues. If student videos are to be shared publicly outside of the LMS, instructors must request written permission from their students. FERPA rules must be strictly observed and discussions about grades as they relate to the videos can never be made public.