THE VALUE OF NEWS PROGRAMME VIDEOS AS A TOOL IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

The article reports on the experience of using news programme videos in teaching English as a Foreign Language. The use of this up-to-date information resource cannot be overestimated because videos with the factual authentic content covering various aspects of people's lives are notable for their educational value, developing character and academic potential. All three above-mentioned components of learning with the help of news videos benefited our military students in the preparation for the Annual International Foreign Language Competition that is open to all higher military schools and to all institutions of higher education which offer educational programmes in the military faculty in Russia. The two-year practice of preparing for the competitions has come into focus of analysis in the article. The analysis reveals the most challenging issues the students have to face and the ways enabling them to overcome common language problems. The activity of the teacher as a facilitator of this process must be well thought over and organized. Various teaching techniques at each successive stage of working with the news video are examined in terms of their application to develop all types of speech activity, i.e. listening, reading, writing and speaking. Different teaching stages (previewing, while-viewing and post-viewing) in watching news videos provide a wide range of language and speaking practice exercises enhancing all types of speech activity simultaneously. As a result, a training situation aimed at parallel development of listening, reading, writing and speaking proves to be highly effective because it serves a very useful purpose of simulating real-life communication.

Keywords: news video, teaching techniques, communicative competence, a simulated training situation, effective communication, types of speech activity.

1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays higher education faces plenty of problems caused by the necessity to train highly skilled and qualified workforce meeting the challenges of the present time. It is extremely important in training military men whose professional activity determines the defensive capacity of a nation. The military competence of future officers includes psychosocial communicative competence along with command, scientific, professional and specifically military competences. The former demands that military students “are able to communicate in a foreign language in the main situations of professional formal and informal communication, which are included in the training programme and do not break the rules of professional etiquette” [1; 169]. Consequently, it is reasonable to arrange speaking practice by simulating real professional discourse, all components of which are clear, comprehensible and monosemantic to discourse participants [2]. Learning practice of using news videos enables educators to achieve the goal with all types of speech activity being developed simultaneously on the same teaching material generated by news items. The authors of the article make an attempt to analyse their work experience in using original news videos while preparing the cadets for the International Foreign Language Competition between cadets of higher educational institutions, which was hosted by the Military University of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation in 2018.

2 METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in the process of cadets’ preparation for the International Foreign Language Competition “World Mass Media report” [3]. The group of cadets who took part in it consisted of the military students who had won the foreign language competitions at the military school level. This group was exposed to extensive training in the extra-curricular hours. The increased study hours resulted in remarkable achievements and significant progress in English compared to the results produced by military students in the other groups, who followed the standard curriculum. The training programme was developed to focus on the skills necessary to cope with the tasks of the Competition. The task of Round I was to write an essay. Round II checked reading skills. Round III
demonstrated speaking skills in a dialogue. And the last round, Round IV, was a team competition. Two out of four rounds of the Competition used the video information of the news agencies given on the websites of the same name. News videos proved to be an excellent way to facilitate real-life communicative simulation. In the first round a cadet had to write an opinion essay after watching the video once. In the third round a cadet had to make a phone call after watching the video also once. He had to give a structured account of what he had seen and to express his opinion on the issue addressed in the video. Those tasks corresponded to real life situations of professional discourse when an officer has to quickly analyse the situation he has seen and to report it to his commander orally or in writing stating his personal opinion on the situation. Consequently, the Competition tasks not only assessed the language level of the participants but were an effective means of simulating real life communication, which is extremely valuable to motivate students.

3 RESULTS

3.1 The teaching value of news videos as a learning tool

3.1.1 Educational development value

Educational value of tasks based on news videos is in using the up-to-date information. Firstly, information taken from real life and able to influence the current situation raises much stronger interest and realizes much greater educational potential. Secondly, authenticity of the language material makes this task very valuable. Cadets could listen to native English speakers as well as English-speaking representatives of other nations with their specific pronunciation features, people of different ages, occupations and levels of education. Thirdly, the content of the used videos was professionally oriented, which broadened the cadets’ professional horizons. All videos showed military conflicts and hostilities in the modern world.

3.1.2 Ideological and moral development value

Ideological development value cannot be overestimated because news programmes focus on the major extraordinary events. Cadets have the opportunity to analyse these events and to evaluate rather positive role models as well as the negative ones which can only be unanimously condemned. News videos covering the situations in the most volatile hot spots of the world support to evoke “the feeling of patriotism, of the officer honour and military duty, moral and psychological readiness to defend the Motherland, the feeling of pride and responsibility for being in the ranks of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” [1; 169].

3.1.3 Language development value

The teaching value of working with news videos is in the possibility to practice all types of speech activity (listening, reading, speaking and writing) using the same learning material. The success in this work depends on many factors. Firstly, it depends on the recording quality and its length. The most appropriate length of the video is 3-5 minutes. This length gives the listener an opportunity to adjust to individual peculiarities of the speaker, to remember the information he has got, using the capacity of his short-term or recent memory [4]. Secondly, video news engages two main channels of communicating information simultaneously: sight and hearing. It is common knowledge that for most people visual information is much easier to perceive and remember. Besides, visual picture accompanying the news provides the listener with non-verbal communication means, which also contributes to good understanding. Thirdly, the very structure of the news video enables the listener to catch all the details of the news [5]. At first the news is presented by the broadcaster. Then the event is reported by the pressman working on the spot. Next the microphone is passed to the direct participants or to the direct witnesses who give the personal immediate impressions of the situation. This conventional structure of the news item provides some cyclic recurrence of the information. The same event is described by different synonymic linguistic means, by stylistic devices of different functional styles, which range from formal, businesslike and journalistic in the broadcaster’s speech to informal colloquial in the participants’ interviews. Educational, ideological and language development value of news videos works well for higher educational results at all three stages of watching them.
3.2 Developing all types of skills at three stages of working with news videos

3.2.1 Pre-viewing stage

At this stage it is highly recommended to arrange some preparation work, which will make the task performance easier. The teacher can trigger the panel discussion of the topic which will be in focus in the video. Firstly, this preparation can dispose students towards receiving information, can draw their background knowledge, intellectual and life experience. It will activate the mechanism of anticipating and predicting information. Secondly, pre-viewing discussion, in which the teacher deliberately uses new vocabulary items that are key to understand the video, is a natural and effective way to avoid learning difficulties before watching the news. If a cadet does not know a word or a grammar structure but hears it in the discussion, he has more chances to guess its meaning, which will facilitate the understanding of the news item as a whole. Thirdly, pre-viewing discussion allows to practice speaking skills both in monologue and dialogue. Therefore, listening to the other participant of the dialogue starts already before watching the video itself. If the teacher arranges preparation in the form of answering the printed questions, he can use key vocabulary items in these questions wording, thus organizing the training of reading skills. Reading practice at this stage can also be provided by giving cadets the task to read a text devoted to the problem brought up in the video.

3.2.2 While-viewing stage

At the while-viewing stage cadets were allowed to make notes to use them later to write an essay (Round I) and to make a phone call (Round III). It was a good practice of writing skills, of the skill to take notes, which is a necessary academic skill providing the recording of everything seen and heard. As for the essay, it was obligatory to use the facts of the video to support the arguments or counterarguments. This influenced the cadet's score. An effective phone call also required a skill to keep brief notes because the competition demanded of the participants to highlight three content points which were covered in the news video. It is worth emphasizing that listening to the broadcaster, looking at the screen and simultaneously making notes are not an easy task expecting from a student a sharp focus of attention and task-oriented training. The listener has to catch what was said, how important it was, how it was linked to the other content points of the video. Given a high flow of information in the news programmes, he has very little time to write down the main idea. It should be reminded that the cadet was allowed to watch the video only once. Based on everything mentioned above, it is possible to state that a developed skill of listening to the news is a good indicator of an advanced level of the English language knowledge. Including the tasks testing this skill level in the Foreign Language Competition is a right thing to do.

To achieve the advanced level results it was necessary to turn to the information of the news agencies websites in every class. The preparation work was carried out in two ways: the work at the content and at the language of the news video. Thus, cadets watched the same video more than once but the tasks were different. The first viewing is usually aimed at getting the general idea of the video. The cadets were asked to focus on the title of the news item, which was voiced by the broadcaster and could be read on the screen, and to concentrate on the key content points, which often pop up on the screen as subtitles. When the title is announced, the teacher can stop the recording and ask the cadets to orally predict the further events. When the recording was played again, the cadets were asked to do one of the tasks: 1) to check how accurate the prediction was; 2) to read and to choose the right answer to the question out of three-four suggested options; 3) to repeat after the broadcaster some parts of the news item. If the news agency website provides the viewers with captioned videos, these captions can also be used as a learning tool, for example to check how accurately the student reproduces the broadcaster’s words. This type of work cannot be overestimated to understand the grammar rules of making English sentences. Thus, the while-viewing exercises show that all types of speech activity can be involved in learning process, apart from the most obvious one – listening.

3.2.3 Post-viewing stage

In the Foreign Language Competition after watching a news video the cadets were given the task to write an opinion essay on the topic presenting a clear view on the problem, using the facts from the video and correctly using 10 vocabulary items from the list given in the task. Writing an essay is a
complex competence requiring from a student a set of developed skills. As for critical thinking skills, all the tasks to make a plan of a piece of writing, to organize the thoughts, to arrange the ideas according to the importance, to differentiate facts from opinion, to identify major reasons and to find supporting details need a specific analytical approach. It is crucial to teach cadets to communicate the thoughts logically using proper linking words and transitions, to make them familiar with the established and socially accepted patterns of writing an introduction, a paragraph and a conclusion. While assessing the essays the jury members examined the range of the used vocabulary items and grammar structures, the level of their sophistication and compliance with the formal register of the written speech. To meet all the requirements the work on the essay must be done step-by-step moving gradually from some simple things to more sophisticated ones.

On the whole, a set of tasks at the post-viewing stage may be rather broad. First, it is necessary to check the exercises done at the while-viewing stage. Then cadets may do one of the following tasks: 1) to work with the news video script as if it were an ordinary text, for example, to find and to read the ways to express cause and effect relationship, to identify the means to clarify the information, etc.; 2) to paraphrase some sentences or separate word combinations; 3) to answer wh-questions about the video content; 4) to translate a part of the script from English into the mother tongue; 5) to make the oral summary of the video content; 6) to make a role play. Thus, cadets are gradually and steadily progressing towards real communication. The news video serves as a starting point providing an information fragment for further contemplation, analysis and communication in a foreign language.

4 CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, watching news videos acts as a powerful incentive to most students. This work diversifies classroom activities, makes classes more interesting and exciting. That is why there are plenty of websites on the Internet which advise how to use videos in class but in most cases these videos are not news videos but components of some course book arranged according to the curriculum topics. Working with authentic news programmes is a bit different. Firstly, it demands a rather advanced language level, which must be reached before. If working with authentic English is still too challenging, there are websites to learn English through the news programmes [6]. There are few of them but their great advantage lies in the fact that the news video is supported by a set of exercises with answer key, which makes the student’s work autonomous and self-controlled. Broadcasters introduce new vocabulary items, work at the pronunciation and the usage. The full script of the video is often supplied. Moreover, news videos are arranged according to the language level and even a beginner can find some material matching his knowledge level.

Apart from motivating value, news videos have a great language development value. Our experience of preparing the cadets for the International Foreign Language Competition showed that news videos can be used to develop a complex communicative skill including all types of speech activity (listening, reading, writing and speaking) at all stages of the news viewing, which makes the simulated learning practice closer to real life communication.

REFERENCES


