Authentic Video Materials for Foreign Language Instruction

Michael Shaughnessy
Washington & Jefferson College

Video is often viewed as the ultimate multimedia material for foreign language instruction because of the many layers of information present. The visual elements stimulate the student learner through the cultural aspects and the audio adds listening comprehension aspects to the educational value of the video. Perhaps it is the two elements in tandem that, when combined, provide a rich, multi-layered audio-visual-cultural elements not provided by other forms of media. The cultural element of authentic video is perhaps the reason why video is used in the foreign language classroom. At its best, it can approximate 'being there,' and provide students with multi-faceted input that they might encounter while 'in country.' With the fast approaching reality of on demand digital video, the time is right to discuss some possibilities of digital video in the L2 classroom, and look a bit to the future of on-demand worldwide video.

Traditional Sources

While films are surely to be considered 'authentic' video, these traditional sources are often supplanted with video that is not intended to be from high culture. Nevertheless, both exist for commercial purchase and this purchase is becoming easier with reduced international shipping. Some importers now charge the shipping price from their offices in the US (http://globalbooks.de). Media outlets such as Amazon.com, fr, de, es, etc sell and ship from their respective countries and provide the same media to international consumers as to domestic consumers. Multi-standard VCRs are common and code-free DVD players are increasing in availability. Some DVD players can be unlocked by means of a code, often entered through the remote control or programmed through a disc. On computers, the international controls are software based and can be manipulated by the proprietary program or an add-on-software such as DVDGenie. Such programs, however, may infringe on copyright restrictions and additional hardware may be needed to have full access to the traditional sources of authentic video.

An ever increasing number of sites are streaming and offering downloadable video. For digital authentic video, this has been the standard for several years now. Most often, news agencies offer streaming clips of popular news stories and may even offer live RSS news feeds. www.surfmusik.de provides a collection of links for free lives streams.

As live video from around the world develops in the digital age, the transition manifests itself in digitized video. Many clips are perma-

nently hosted on various servers and are searchable through a variety of means: video.google.com/, altavista.com/video/, video.search.yahoo.com/, and singingfish.com/ to name a few. The most important features for searching for video include the ability to limit the search by domain, allowing the user to search individual countries and institutions, and not merely produce a video that is in the target language. Additionally, the ability of the user to preview the video through mouse rollover and animated gif file allows the instructor to see if the video might be useful without downloading the entire file for preview.

Often, meta-data is included in the video file which gives you information about the language, length, topic, and copyright status of a video. While some of the aforementioned search engines allow users to search for video, many of them search only based on the title given to the video file or the words in proximity to the link. Singingfish.com searches the meta-data embedded within the video to produce better results.

Libraries and digital archives are fast becoming the greatest contributors of digital content that is most useful for educators. As archivists digitize and add relevant meta-data to video taken by language educators, many institutions are offering this material online to the greater public. A good example of this is the OhioLink Digital Media Center: http://worlddmc.ohiolink.edu/Language/Login

As digital assets management becomes more standardized thanks to the efforts of archivists around the world, educators will find more standardization in search techniques. The use of meta-data and the search fields associated with this data are currently the standard.

The Open Archives Initiative provides a protocol for metadata harvesting and use. The project currently has 6,000,000 registered records. This database comprises text, audio, video, and image. http://www.oaister.org/

Peer reviewed collections and digital asset collections through educational institutions will be a great source of authentic materials in the future and will cut down the time it takes to search for the most appropriate form of media for class.

Future trends

Simply put, the future of authentic video is digital on demand worldwide video. This video is authentic, up to date, of high quality, and due to the choices available, perfect for curriculum integration. Teachers can choose the type of video they want not only in the target language, but also from specific regions. This feature will highlight the importance of cultural instruction in CALL. Currently, there are several online TV sites, using terms such as DVB (Digital Video Broadcasting) or PVR (Personal Video Recorder).

(http://www.dvbdream.org/) Features of such services are described here: http://www.sonicolor.es/catalogo/docs/satelite/skycatal.pdf

NeepTV is a comprehensive site featuring many TV (and Radio) channels from throughout the world. Subscriptions run as low as $60 per year http://www.neeptv.com.

The EPG (Electronic Program Guide) is a standard feature for these sites, allowing you to search for your favorite shows and program them in for viewing. http://www.titantv.com

The PVR technology allows you (much like the popular cable service TiVo) to schedule, record, save, and view your shows at your convenience. The digital versions of the PVR clearly allow for worldwide application with broadband access. Several test sites are currently running this service and provide incredible results for users. http://www.shift.tv/eng/ provides basic Cable for ?5 per month and www.onlinetvrecorder.de provides free access with limited download capabilities.

While the quality of these services ranges widely, the higher quality sites demonstrate what is possible in this field. Shortly, instructors will have a complete digital library of shows, films, and other authentic digital videos at their fingertips that they can access from anywhere in the world. Students will view live television and news reports at the same time as the native speakers.

All of this is bound to have significant pedagogical applications, particularly in the arena of cultural / area studies. As authentic videos become easier to access, the real need will be for instructors to find out how to best integrate them into the curriculum. This column will revisit this topics again to discuss the ever increasing availability of network based authentic video and to see how such materials can be effectively brought into the foreign language and culture classroom.