



Voice-overs as Good Teacher Assistants in Online CLIL Courses

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Abstract

Given the vast presence of technological aids in the process of teaching and learning, it seems quite logical to promote autonomy among L2 learners and decrease their dependence on their teachers by encouraging the use of self-study packages, a good example of which is voice-over slides. This comparative study investigated the effects of employing mute versus voice-over slides in CLIL courses. The participants consisted of 28 MA students within the age range of 22-45 randomly assigned to two experimental groups, both studying their Advanced Testing Course. The members of the first group received mute slides presented by the professor on two lengthy chapters of their course books on Test Construction Procedures and Language Testing Eras. The second group studied the same chapters through using the same collection of slides with the voice of the same professor recorded on each slide over six weeks. After the treatment, both groups took a post-test on the covered areas. The voice-over group also filled in an attitude questionnaire towards the use of voice-over slides at the end of the course. The process of data analysis demonstrated no statistically significant difference between the achievement scores of the students on the posttest. This finding underscores the value of teaching with voice-overs as a useful alternative to more conventional resources (mute slides) and draws attention to the relative merits of embedding voice-overs in online learning tasks in settings when teaching in the class is not a possible option. Moreover, the responses of the students to the questionnaire revealed their positive attitude towards the use of this self-study tool.

Keywords: CALL, CLIL, Educational Technology, Mute slides, PowerPoint Presentations, Voice-over Slides.

1. Background

With the outbreak of the coronavirus in 2019, the world faced multiple severe crises in different areas including the field of education. Therefore, some urgent adjustments were required in the field of teaching and learning to cope with the changes. Such an experience could be both challenging and rewarding. It could be an extraordinary opportunity for learning and upgrading one's knowledge of technology and showing how adaptable and flexible teachers and students could be in the face of unpredictable roadblocks. Fortunately, the many advantages of digital technology in L2 learning, including the availability of learning resources free from time and place restrictions as well as the learners' control over the pace of the learning process [1], enabled educational authorities to replace physical classes with digital platforms immediately.

This new era has brought about new challenges and responsibilities for both teachers and students. For one thing, due to the lack of access to physical language classes, learners are required to become more autonomous. Learner autonomy has been defined as learner's ability to take responsibility for their own learning process [2]. However, it has been reconceptualized after giving increased attention to technology-enhanced learning and giving it a more complex and promising role [3].

Integrating content and language is increasingly practiced in university classrooms all over the world especially at tertiary levels. One of the main goals for using this approach, along with the primary objective of mastering a language and learning the subject matter, is to prepare the learners for life in a more natural and authentic context [4 & 5]. According to Mearns [6], unlike the traditional FL teaching methods and approaches, CLIL's fundamental objective is to foster competence and confidence in language users, while simultaneously not impairing the process of teaching the subject matter. Undoubtedly, during the pandemic, when face-to-face classes are not available in several countries, students need to act more autonomously in order not to lag behind in their studies. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to professors



and teachers in CLIL courses to introduce and employ some techniques, such as voice-over slides, in their classes to help the students learn more successfully.

In an EFL classroom, whether online or offline, teachers should employ some strategies and techniques to attract and sustain the attention of the learners and promote their autonomy. PowerPoint presentations can efficiently assist teachers in achieving both of these purposes. As one of the first types of presentation software, PowerPoint slides help their users to combine colored texts and images with simple animation and sound and create audio-visual effects in the classroom while teaching, which could be highly effective in freezing students' attention and interest. They can also help teachers to make their teaching more interesting and motivating [7]. It is emphasized that, although both teachers and students are showing interest in employing PowerPoint presentations in the process of teaching and learning, it has not been free from various controversies around it, as it happens with the appearance of any new technology in the field of education. Some researchers have considered it as "highly supportive", whereas some have accused it of playing a "significantly negative" role in the field of education [8].

Accessing audio besides the content on PowerPoint slides provides better cognitive-based personalization in learning. Cognitive-based personalization utilizes some data about learning preferences or styles from a primarily cognitive perspective to present content particularly targeted at a host of learner attributes. For instance, learners may decide to use an audio option simply because they prefer to hear the text while reading it, or they may prefer to receive the content in a linear fashion rather than a random one [9].

What one hears through the speaker's intonation, diction, and inflection conveys a richer understanding not only of the content but of the speaker [10]. Providing both visual and auditory input through the use of voice-over slides can satisfy more learning preferences and promote learning outcomes more efficiently especially when the learners are involved in self-study or cannot participate in face-to-face classes.

2. Method

2.1 Research Question

This study targeted the following question:

To what extent does the use of voice-over versus teacher-presented mute slides affect L2 learners' achievement in CLIL courses?

2.2 Instruments

The following instruments were used to achieve the purposes of this study:

A 13-item teacher-made posttest (10 multiple-choice items and 3 open-ended questions).

A multiple-choice Likert Scale questionnaire consisting of 32 items

2.3 Participants

A total number of 28 male and female graduate students majoring in English Teaching at Islamic Azad University, Tehran North Branch participated in this study. Their ages ranged between 22 and 40 years old. They were in two intact classes with 14 students in each class. The two classes were randomly assigned to a mute slides group (EXI) and a voice-over group (EXII).

2.4 Procedure

Since none of the participants had any pre-knowledge of the course content, no pretest was given to them. Therefore, the six-session (each session 90 minutes, once a week) treatment period began from the second week of the semester (in February 2019) for teaching two of the important sections of the syllabus, namely, Language Testing Eras and Test Construction Procedures using adobe connect.

EXI studied about 12 mute slides every session. The professor explained each slide in the online class, and then there were some question-and-answer activities. Several examples were provided by both the professor and the students. However, EXII received the voice-overs for self-study purposes. They watched and listened to the slides (about 12 slides for each session) at home and then discussed them in the class among themselves and with the professor. There was no deliberate act on the part of the professor to attract the attention of the students to any specific point in the slides. Both groups studied exactly the same content materials.



3. Results

After the completion of the required sessions, a posttest was administered to the participants of the experimental groups to measure the probable difference between the effects of the two different kinds of instruction. The descriptive statistics of the posttest scores of the two experimental groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Posttest of the Two Groups

Groups	N	Min.	Max.	Mean		SD	Skewness	
				Statistic	Std. Error		Statistic	Std. Error
EXI: Mute-slides	14	4.0	15.0	10.57	1.12	4.21	-0.65	0.59
EXII: Voice-overs	14	10.0	16.0	12.92	0.52	1.96	-0.22	0.59

Next, a Levene's test and an independent samples t-test were run to compare the mean scores of the two groups on the posttest (Table 2).

Table 2. Independent Samples t-test for the Posttest Scores of the Two Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal Variances assumed	14.70	0.01	1.89	26	0.06	2.35	1.24	-0.20	4.91
Equal variances not assumed			1.89	18.40	0.07	2.35	1.24	-0.25	4.96

With $t(26) = 1.89$, $p = 0.06$ (two-tailed), it was concluded that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups on the posttest. Moreover, after the completion of the study, a 32-item Likert-scale questionnaire, constructed by the researchers, was given to the voice-over group to learn about their attitude to the use of voice-over slides. The descriptive statistics of the results are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Scores on the Questionnaire

	N	Min.	Max.	Sum	Mean	SD	Skewness	
							Statistic	Std. Error
Total stats	10	99.00	133.00	1174.00	117.40	9.54	-.192	.687
Valid N	10							

The Cronbach Alpha reliability quotient of the participants' scores on the questionnaire was equal to .68. Since it was the first time that this questionnaire had been administered, and the number of the respondents was limited, the result was satisfactory. The results showed that the majority of the



respondents (66.4 % = 31.8 % agree + 34.6 % strongly agree) had a positive attitude towards the use of self-study voice-overs.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrated that voice-overs can successfully substitute teacher presence in CLIL online contexts and function as efficiently as teacher-presented mute slides in the class. They also showed that the students have a positive attitude towards using them in CLIL courses. Most of the students believed that voice-overs could be a good substitute for the teacher when face-to-face or online classes were not available, and because of their availability and ease of creation and use, they could function as good supplementary material in all their classes. They also maintained that voice-overs added variety to their course of study, boosted their self-confidence, and helped them prepare better for their exam. They even expressed interest in having more sections of the syllabus to be taught by using voice-overs.

The overall findings of this study highlight the value of teaching with voice-overs as useful alternatives to their mute counterparts and draw attention to the benefits of using voice-overs in online learning tasks in settings when teaching in the class is not a viable option. However, the researchers have no intention of introducing voice-overs as absolute substitutes for teachers in the classroom and believe that using a mixture of voiced and mute slides could be very useful in CLIL classes. Therefore, they look at such slides as assistants and not substitutes. It is also emphasized that the body of research addressing the comparison of these two techniques is quite lean and further investigations are required to evaluate their efficacies in instructional contexts.

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