

CREATING CALL MODULES USING AUTHENTIC VIDEO DOCUMENTS FOR ORAL COMPREHENSION

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Résumé

Pour motiver des étudiants universitaires à améliorer leur capacité de compréhension orale en anglais, des modules multimédia contenant des vidéos authentiques comme documents centraux ont été développés. Pour mettre en place une méthodologie de création de ces modules, nous nous sommes basés sur les phases d'apprentissage des langues ainsi que sur la description du niveau B2 du CECR. L'utilisation des modules par les étudiants et la réussite relative de cet emploi sont aussi développées.

Abstract

In order to encourage university students to improve their oral comprehension capacities in English, CALL modules have been developed using authentic video documents. The theory behind language learning stages as well as B2 level capacities as described by the CEFR gave rise to the methodology used to create the modules. How students use the modules and their relative success is also discussed.

Introduction

The objective of the English teaching program at the University of Claude Bernard in Lyon (UCBL) is to allow our Masters students to reach level B2 in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR)¹. UCBL students are science, technology or medical students. On arrival at the university, most of the students are at a level in the vicinity of A2 or just above. An entire program has been established starting the first year of undergraduate studies called L1 up to the last year of graduate studies called M2. (The years are classified as follows: L1, L2, L3, M1, M2). Each semester of the program has its own objectives, and there are more general objectives for each degree (Bachelors and Masters, see appendix). To reach these objectives, the work that learners must accomplish for each language skill has been devised, whether it be in class with the professor or in a self-study context.

1. CEFR

What concerns us here is oral comprehension. In our end-of-semester assessments, students tend to consider this skill as very difficult to master. Some even claim that it is a skill that they will never be able to acquire. At pedagogical meetings, the English teachers underline the trouble students have acquiring this skill. These comments may be easier to understand when reading the objectives for this skill as they are described in the CEFR and keeping in mind that a great number of students are at the A2 level on arrival at the university:

I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect. (CEFR: B2 listening)¹

We referred to this description to develop pedagogical activities focusing on this skill. Several parameters must be taken into consideration when creating such activities along with the CEFR description: the subject of the video document, its length, the style and the language used (standard English or not). At the UCBL, we are fortunate to have a multimedia language facility that can be used for self-study or class work. Our learners can concentrate on listening activities if teachers create worksheets or other aids to help them with the oral documents. These aids should include pre-listening and listening activities as well as post-listening if possible.

1. See *The Europass Language Passport*.
http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/img/dynamic/c1349/type.FileContent.file/ELPEexamples_en_GB.pdf, accessed 16/07/08.

2. Authentic documents

The only type of oral documents used in our CALL (computer-assisted language learning) modules are authentic ones. Ginet (1997: 44) insists on the use of such documents when creating multimedia modules. By authentic, we mean documents that were produced for English speakers in the intent of something other than language learning. Of course, we can also consider that authentic means spontaneous, unlearned production in the intent of communicating with a co-speaker. In this case, the teacher can be considered as being authentic listening material as well.

Although the two “productions” are authentic, the oral documents used were not produced in an “authentic context”. In what could be considered an authentic context of production, the teacher can repeat him/herself, use pauses, hesitations, state things otherwise, answer questions, negotiate content and meaning with the students. But s/he is speaking to non-native speakers with language learning in mind. The speaker in the oral document is speaking to an audience of native English speakers and his/her goal is something other than language learning. S/he knows his/her text and rarely repeats him/herself. Any pauses are natural and dictated by the language. The flow is often rapid and the vocabulary more technical, often more sophisticated or formal, than that of the teacher’s. This language is quite similar to that of the extended speech and lectures mentioned in the CEFR. It is the language that our future scientists will have to understand in their professional lives. As future scientists, our students will have to take part in scientific conferences; as future industrialists, they will have to negotiate with non-French-speaking clients and executives. Thus they will have to be prepared for such situations and the language skills that are needed.

3. Creating CALL modules for oral comprehension

In order to do this, for the past five years, we have developed video-centered modules and made them available to our first-year Master’s students. These modules can be found on-line on UCBL’s educational platform called SPIRAL (*Serveur Pédagogique Interactif de Ressources d’Apprentissage de Lyon 1*). The different modules that have been developed were done so with the different language learning stages in mind as described by Narcy (in Ginet, 1997: 58-65). After having studied these different stages (Boulon, 2002: 109-119) we created our first module in 2003. All of the modules created since then contain various listening activities. The objectives of each activity are in keeping with the language learning stages. They go from distinguishing individual words for the weakest students (stage 0), towards general comprehension of the video document for the strongest (stage 2 and maybe

3) and include discerning word groups and understanding each sentence for the activities in-between (stage 1).

The heart of these activities is an authentic video clip. Fortunately, today, we can find authentic videos on numerous sites. The CALL modules created to help learners acquire oral comprehension skills are centered on these videos for the most part. What distinguishes these modules from the ones found on the market apart from the fact that authentic documents are used is that the modules are split up into language learning stages instead of levels. Students can access the modules at whatever learning stage they are at. There are four stages per module. Each one corresponds to a learning stage, going from discovery (stage 0) to general comprehension (stage 2). All three stages are based on accuracy, that is to say the bottom-up process, going from the form to the meaning (Narcy, in Ginet, 1997: 60-65). As regards listening comprehension, that means going from hearing, actually distinguishing, the sound or sounds to understanding the word or sentence created by that sound (or those sounds). The learner looks for the stage of the module that corresponds to his/her learning stage. From there, s/he does the work indicated in each activity, step by step, until s/he finishes the rest of the activities of the module. This scenario was chosen in keeping with various studies on self-learning that promote learning activities based on individual learning strategies, rhythms, and ease of use. In short, they have to remain within the scope of human logic and not computer logic (Bibeau, 1993: 73; Demaizière & Dubuisson, 1992: 117; Furstenberg, 1997: 64-75, etc.).

The modules are quite simple to create on our SPIRAL platform. Each module contains several parts, each part (or step, or task, etc.) contains at least one interactive activity. For the module presented here, the format of the activities resembles a simple questionnaire. Once users have typed out their response, they are told whether their answers are correct or not and are allowed to try again as often as they like. Learners are allowed to ask for the correct answer if they can not understand what they hear. This allows the learners to continue without the excess frustration that can sometimes do harm to the learning process. The video document remains on the screen and can be visualized indefinitely. The user can go back one second or several seconds to listen to a word, a sentence or a whole paragraph that s/he did not understand. This allows the learner to work at his/her own pace.

The modules created are succinctly evaluated during the end-of-semester assessment of the course. Oral evaluations of the modules have also been conducted. No formal evaluation has yet been undertaken.

4. Methodology and current use

The method used to create such a module can be generalized and used with all authentic audio or video documents.

4.1. Choosing a video document

First, a document must be chosen. A few years ago, we had to take what existed or create our own documents. Today we are lucky to have a considerable choice. Up to now, we have been using those that come from the ESA (European Space Agency) or NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) sites since these two agencies allow their videos to be used for educational purposes. The parameters stated above must be taken into consideration. At UCBL, scientific, technological or medical subjects are preferred in order to remain within our students' fields of studies. The videos chosen are around 5 minutes long. This length does not seem to correspond to the "extended speech" used in the CEFR description. But since the description is not very explicit, it seemed more appropriate to choose four or five-minute documents that allowed the learner to study the document in depth and then start with a second document which would widen his/her listening capacities rather than choose a single 20-minute document, for example, which would be impossible to study in depth because of its length and which would limit the learner's exposure to different vocabulary and syntax. The style of the documents chosen had to be that of a researcher or professor, a style which is very close to the style that the students will encounter in the scientific and technical world that they will enter after their studies. The language must be standard English for the same reasons, but a multitude of accents can be used to better prepare the students to understand their future European, Asian, or Australian colleagues, and so on.

It is also very useful to check the length of time that a document remains on-line. There are many documents, especially those found on radio sites, that disappear after a few weeks. If a document disappears, the multimedia module that is linked to it becomes worthless. All the work the teacher put into it is lost. This is another reason that ESA and NASA sites were chosen. They not only present topics that deal with scientific or medical subjects, but they also stock their videos indefinitely in their archives and classify them so that they can be easily found. The ESA video that was used in our first module in 2003 is still available to the students today.

It is also worthwhile checking that the video document is in a format that can be read by a majority of the users. Our multimedia center contains only two players that can read only one format each (.wmp and .ra). We are very careful to create modules that use only one format or the other. This makes it possible for teachers to use these modules not only as self-learning material, but as class work as well.

4.2. Incorporating language learning stages

Once the document has been chosen with these parameters in mind, listening activities have to be developed within the scope of Nancy's language learning stages.

Let's recall the stages that concern listening comprehension only:

- Stage 0: noticing obstacles that limit oral comprehension, awareness of the gap between L1 and L2 thus creating the need to distinguish between certain phonemes in L2 that prevent the learner from understanding a word (Narcy, in Ginet, 1997: 60).
- Stage 1: awareness of the phonetic gaps between L1 and L2, transfer of this knowledge to progressive written production (one or two words at first, then a few at a time in a later activity, for example) (Narcy, in Ginet, 1997: 61). Knowledge must be brought to the level of conscious awareness in order to be remembered and considered as declarative (Ellis, 1990: 176-177).
- Stage 2: establishing controlled processes which focus on rendering the bottom level (structure) automatic (i.e. [z] = "is"). The content must be foreseeable to reduce the semantic burden when trying to understand (Narcy, in Ginet, 1997: 62).
- Stage 3: creating output, authentic use of the language which is by nature unforeseeable and spontaneous; meaning-based; can lead to remediation (Narcy, in Ginet, 1997: 62).

This last stage takes place in class, or in any case, outside a CALL context. A minimum of one speaker and a co-speaker are needed for this last stage.

We shall now develop the three other stages with regard to the methodology used to create modules for oral comprehension.

4.3. Step one: introduction

The module contains first an introductory page including four activities that correspond to three learning stages, and any other possible side activities that develop awareness of other structures, vocabulary, and so on, found in the oral document.

In the introduction, it is clearly stated that the learner can start work on the first activity that requires some effort on his/her part. If the first one is too easy, s/he can start at the second one. It is not mandatory for the learners to complete the activities that they may find too easy.

It is also in the introduction that the learner is provided with the link to the video document. In order to avoid any technical complications, a step-by-step path is described as well in order to allow the learner to obtain the video by going through the site. Simple links are often quickly outdated. Sometimes videos are put into archives and this modifies their addresses, sometimes the sites themselves move elsewhere. Providing a step-by-step path has proven to be the most valid solution.

4.4. Step two: stage 0 activities

The first activity corresponds to stage 0. There are some students who have rarely ever been exposed to authentic oral material. They often find themselves at a loss when asked to listen to a document in class and answer questions pertaining to the document afterwards. With this in mind, the first activity was developed as a simple list of words contained in the oral document in the same order as they are stated. There are two instructions. The first asks the learner to look over the list and to look up any word that s/he may not understand. We know that most learners do not make the effort to look up the words at this stage. There is no apparent need at this point, no obstacle to overcome. But encouraging the learners at this stage makes it possible for them to look up the words during a later activity, once they feel they need to.

The next instructions ask the learners to follow the list of words as they listen to the document. For the learners at stage 0, this seems to be an essential step. We have noticed over the past five years of using this type of module that the majority of students start with this activity, even though they are allowed to start with any other one. It is quite possible that a student who understands the teacher quite well has trouble understanding the oral document for reasons stated above.

The first activity helps them to follow the whole document. As soon as they read a word they do not hear, they have to go back to the beginning of the sentence and listen again to try and hear it. This allows the learners to discover the “obstacles” they have to overcome in order to understand, which is one of the objectives of stage 0 learning. If the word that was missed is an article or any other non-stressed word, the learner may soon discover that s/he did not hear it the first time because it was non-stressed. As s/he listens the second time, s/he has a better chance of hearing the word because s/he knows it is there and s/he knows that it is in the sentence somewhere. Once s/he is aware that certain non-stressed words are hard to hear, the learner might even hear them the first time round.

When the spelling of a word in the list resembles that of a French word, the learner may not hear it as s/he listens the first time; s/he may be expecting L1 pronunciation. S/he then has to listen to the sentence a second time. This time, s/he might notice the difference between the pronunciation of the same word in the L1 compared to the L2. It may be that at this point the learner makes up his/her own “rules” or hypotheses about L2 pronunciation. What has definitely been observed is that the learner who did not hear word “n” in the first activity was able not only to hear it but also to write it out in the following activities. Learning to hear and understand one word in a module seems to become acquired within that same module. It might be interesting to develop modules which have the same lexical basis in order to test whether or not acquisition in one module can be transferred to another module. It could be that the learner would have to start all over again with the first activity

because the vocabulary would no longer be in the same place, pronounced by the same speaker, stressed in the same fashion, etc.

As the learners work on this first activity, we have noticed that their awareness of how L2 words are pronounced sometimes helps them extend this awareness to words that are not on the list. They often ask the teacher to help them understand a particular word or group of words that they have trouble deciphering. In this case, they go beyond the work asked of them in order to overcome other obstacles in their way.

This first listening activity which deals with accuracy (as opposed to fluency) is the first step to hearing separate words and sentences for some students. In fact, many students admit that before working on such modules, their conception of spoken English was that of one extremely long and complicated word. After having worked on this activity, they start to distinguish certain clues that indicate new words or new sentences (they may notice that unstressed words are often found before a noun, that “is” or “was” are heard as [z], etc.). This particular capacity is acquired even when learners listen to another authentic document spoken by a different speaker with a non-standard accent, a higher or lower voice, etc. In spite of this, they tend to start with the first activity again when asked to work on a second similar module. They claim that the first activity helps them become familiar with the vocabulary that they will come across in the document.

One aspect stands out : learners almost never look up a word during the first activity. They focus their attention on phonetic comprehension, on listening for sounds they are not used to hearing, on deciphering words pronounced differently than in L1. Meaning is not yet a concern or an obstacle for the learner.

4.5. Step three: stage 1 activities

As learners start working on the second activity, they enter language learning stage 1. There are several ways of creating this activity. What characterizes it is that it is a strictly guided activity. All the written statements or questions must be found almost word for word in the oral document. There can be only one answer, and it must be made up of only one or two words. The answer must be found in the oral document close to or within the sentence similar to the statement or question. For example, “What devices are necessary for telephone, radio, television, Internet and navigational systems?” is the first question for this part of the module. The learners hear: “Satellites are necessary for telephone, radio, television, Internet and navigational systems.” The word “satellites” is the correct one-word answer. The order of the statements or questions must be the same as that of the document. According to Skehan (1998: 81), all of this is essential so that the learner can concentrate on only one task, that of finding the missing word or words. The types of activities can be common cloze texts, true/false questions, questions/answers, or

multiple choice questions. As the learner listens to the document and finds the one or two words asked for in the questions or statements, s/he writes them or types them out. S/he has already seen most of the words, since they were in the list in the previous activity. Although spelling is not important in this part, corrections are given. The objective is to have the learner understand which word is “missing”, to see if s/he can hear it and distinguish which word it is.

Interestingly, it is in this activity or the next that most learners start to look up the words in a dictionary. Although it is quite possible to find the answers without really knowing what they mean, learners start feeling the need to understand the vocabulary from this point on. Indeed, learning stages are anything but linear, unlike the impression that this contribution may give. It seems that as the learner accomplishes one learning stage and moves up to the next, s/he becomes more aware of other obstacles s/he had missed before. These obstacles then become the objectives of stage 0 learning. Moreover, the fact that the learner is in a mandatory learning context in which s/he is asked to go from one learning stage to the next, s/he becomes aware of certain linguistic aspects that s/he had not yet noticed. We have noticed that this involvement and awareness often leads a learner to discover more obstacles that need to be overcome, such as the words that s/he decides to look up in activity 2. This becomes a cyclic process where one acquired feature leads the learner to another feature that is not yet known. Once learned, it will lead him/her to yet another unknown feature, and the process continues. Ellis states that this is quite possible “given that some grammatical structures seem to be implicated with each other” (Ellis, 1997: 83). It seems possible to state that linguistic aspects in general may be implicated with each other, not simply grammatical structures.

Activity 3 works in the same way as the preceding one, but the learner must use a greater number of words to answer each question. This activity has the learner concentrate not only on technical words, as with the preceding activity, but also on non-stressed words such as determiners. This latter aspect is often the most difficult for the learners. They have a tendency to leave out the determiners or any –s markers. Unlike spelling, this is considered to be an error for this particular activity, since the prime objective of this learning stage is accuracy. For example, one question is: “At what moments will Galileo offer a safety guarantee in the aeronautics field?” The correct answer is: “When a plane is in the air, taking off or landing.” Often, learners will answer: “*When plane in air taking of landing.” The questionnaire will not accept this answer. At this point, the learners can either listen again as often as they like, or decide to work with another learner.

It would seem that the more words the learners are asked to focus on, the more important meaning becomes to them. In our latter example, it is clear that if the learners realize that the sentence is not correct, it will be easier for them to correct themselves without even having to listen a second time. Although this is not the primary objective, it is a clear link to the next step, stage 2 learning.

4.6. Step four: stage 2 activities

The last activity corresponds to stage 2 learning. It is made up of a few questions dealing with the global comprehension of the document. The learner has listened to the document a few times at this point; the content should be rather familiar to allow him/her to concentrate on the structure of his/her answers. Nevertheless, each question covers several sentences of the document which means that the learner must also understand the meaning. S/he can no longer write out just what is missing. For example, one question is: "In detail, describe the principle of satellite navigation." In general, we receive two types of answers. The first one corresponds to a summary of the information; its aim is to answer the question explicitly. The second one consists of a transcription of the sentences that contain elements of the answers. Both types of answers show some progress in stage 2 learning for this type of oral document. In both, the learner concentrates on form. In the first case, s/he uses certain parts of sentences s/he hears, in the second, s/he uses entire sentences that come directly from the document. In both cases, s/he must check for accuracy. S/he can use just what s/he hears, s/he can use school manuals, or s/he can ask an English speaker for help. What is important for the creators of the module is that the learner become involved in his/her learning process.

There is a negative side to this type of learning. Learners are concentrated on accuracy, which can allow them to improve certain structures. However, they are sometimes so concentrated on hearing correctly, that they tend to forget that there are homophones in English. What they write does not always correspond to the meaning of the document although the word that they write sounds just like the one they hear. For instance, "they do not yet no" instead of "they do not yet know". Sometimes sounds slip from one word to the next as with "only Alexis snows" instead of "only Alexis knows". Obviously, the learners here paid no attention to the meaning of what they were listening to.

To cope with this problem, the document would probably have to be discussed in class. This would correspond to stage 3 learning in which meaning and fluency are the priority.

4.7. Step five: stepping stone to stage 3 learning

In the fourth activity, one last question is asked that refers only to certain images of the video. "In the video clip, two images are rather disturbing, one that suggests 'other uses' and one that is used to illustrate the EGNOS system. Can you find these two images and explain in what ways navigation systems could become an issue in the next few years?" This question can be used as a stepping stone to stage 3 since it is an open question and the answer is not found in the document. It is an

opinion question. Surprisingly, about a quarter of the learners do not answer this question. Could the step from stage 2 to 3 be too wide for some? After such strictly guided work that focuses almost entirely on accuracy, might the learners be too self-conscious to answer without any guarantee of accuracy? Those that do answer clearly use top-down processes. Since they pay attention to meaning, they are much less aware of the controlled processes needed for accuracy. Clearly, the link between the two has yet to be developed as a useable tool for language learning.

Conclusion

The learners that have evaluated these modules orally or during the end-of-semester assessments are almost unanimous in saying that this method has allowed them to understand oral English better than before. To be more specific, the weaker students claim to be able to differentiate between words and sentences no matter what document they listen to after having worked with these modules, to understand the general subject of oral documents they listen to in class, and even to hear and decipher many words or technical terms they were not able to distinguish before. The stronger students say they were able to finish the work and understand the documents entirely. We have noticed that there was definite progress on the part of the weakest students, who were finally able to understand the teacher by the end of the semester. However, understanding new authentic oral documents remains a challenge for the majority of the weaker students. Nevertheless, the majority stress the fact that after working on this type of CALL module for oral comprehension, they have a key to listening skills that should allow them to progress.

APPENDIX

General course and degree objectives for UCBL's English program

Licence		
Objectifs généraux	Devenir à l'aise en anglais pour permettre une communication spontanée à l'oral et à l'écrit	
TR2	Oral : pouvoir s'exprimer simplement, clairement et sans appréhension, avec spontanéité. [Les étudiants doivent être prêts à participer spontanément à l'oral dans les cours d'anglais des semestres suivants.]	A2
TR3	restituer à l'oral des documents écrits, savoir retrouver rapidement des informations à l'écrit ou à l'oral sur Internet et pouvoir les restituer dans un format différent	A2+
TR4	compréhension orale de documents variés (débit rapide, accents variés, thèmes et niveaux de langue divers, etc.) et restitution écrite	B1
TR5	communication en situation similaire à des situations professionnelles (comprendre un cours, faire une communication orale, échanger avec des pairs, participer à un entretien d'embauche, savoir parler de soi en valorisant sa formation et ses expériences, comprendre un article scientifique de son domaine d'étude)	B1+

Master	
Objectifs généraux	Maîtriser la communication formelle et informelle dans la spécialité, pouvoir s'exprimer avec spontanéité, atteindre au minimum le niveau B2 dans le cadre européen.
Anglais Scientifique	Écrit : comprendre et savoir rédiger un article scientifique. Oral : pouvoir s'exprimer avec spontanéité, maîtriser la communication formelle et informelle dans la spécialité. Communication : savoir participer activement à un congrès scientifique.
Anglais de l'entreprise	Écrit : rédiger la correspondance professionnelle formelle et informelle. Oral : Pouvoir participer activement à une réunion professionnelle, pouvoir s'exprimer avec spontanéité. Communication : pouvoir participer à un entretien de nature professionnelle, maîtriser la communication formelle et informelle.
Anglais technique	Écrit : comprendre et savoir rédiger des articles et des notices techniques. Oral : savoir expliquer technologies, processus, méthodologies liés à l'industrie, pouvoir s'exprimer avec spontanéité. Communication : pouvoir participer à un entretien de nature professionnelle.

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