

THE PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL OF PRODUCING AUDIOVISUAL REMIXES OF CLASSICAL CHILDREN'S TALES FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF DICTATION AND PHONEMIC TRANSCRIPTION AT UNIVERSITY AND TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Introduction

With the advance of globalisation and with today's ease of access to technology, it has become necessary to adapt teaching practices to cater for and suit an ever-changing society. The availability of resources for the emerging different knowledge areas has allowed language teachers to become more able to see to their students' needs and demands. In turn, learners can also have the opportunity to bring aspects of their everyday life into the educational process, making learning more significant and more meaningful, as they see the practical application of what they are taught.

This article aims at exploring the benefits of using Open Educational Resources (OERs) in the language classroom to foster pronunciation skills. More specifically, we will focus on the profitable use of modern though easily accessible technologies and the implementation of possibilities of adaptation of stories, such as remix, mashup and elements from fanfic writing, to develop creative strategies applied to the practice of phonemic transcription through dictation. This analysis will be carried out from our perspective as teachers of tertiary and university-level pronunciation courses.

Open Educational Resources

In the past decades, many developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have made it possible to make advances in the field of virtual resources oriented towards education. However, one of the main impediments is lack of funding for educational institutions to access many of these resources. Most of them are rather expensive, given the ever-increasing demand and the need to constantly keep up with the advances in technology.

This is where the *Open Educational Resources* (OERs) come to the spotlight. This term was coined by the UNESCO in 2002 (Albright, 2005, as cited in Vignare and Brosch, 2014). It refers to the provision of resources based on ICTs, which are made available free-of-charge

and whose purpose is non-profit consultation of software tools and content (Geith & Vignare, 2008). The term *open* also entails the fact that the use of these resources will not result in the infringement of copyright laws. These resources are in most of the cases accessible from any computer/electronic device with access to the Internet, with the exception of very few which may not be made available in certain regions of the globe.

As Hylén (2007) points out, the basic principle of OERs is sharing knowledge openly, which entails that copyrighted content may also be made available for free access. To this purpose, an agreement is made whereby any person interested in copyright material has free access to it, creating a worldwide non-profit sharing community. The most widely known community is Creative Commons, which in the last couple of years has been experiencing a non-stop growth around the globe.

There is, however, one main disadvantage to OERs. Free-of-charge as they are, some of them may eventually become extinct due to various reasons, such as shortage of funding or decline in the number of users. Therefore, as some of the resources might be short-lived, it is important to have an alternative backup storage of the material produced with the use with OERs, especially with web-based applications.

Remixing

Knobel and Lankshear (2011) establish a distinction between two main types of remixes. The first notion of *remix* is a general concept which has been on for as long as humanity has existed, consisting of adopting certain cultural aspects to produce new and innovative products. The other concept of remix is a current term that has to do with social practices and popular culture and is more related to digital technologies. This concept has been mostly associated to the world of music, where remixes are widely known, especially in the realms of pop and electronic music.

As Knobel and Lankshear (2011) point out, remixing has recently started to be associated to other forms of artistic expression. With the aid of modern technologies, this practice has been expanded to other fields, and now users have the possibility of remixing not only sound but also visual artefacts such as paintings or photographs, and also text and teaching materials.

With the emergence and expansion of social media, people are exposed to remix practices on an everyday basis. Therefore, it might be highly desirable for teachers to strategically use remixing in the design of their syllabi. As a result, the need for Hyper or Multimedia Didactic Materials becomes central to teaching design (Schwartzman & Odetti,

2013). This consists of making use of freely accessible material and adapting it to our own educational practices, with the many underlying benefits that multimedia entails.

Fanfic

Another contemporary phenomenon which is closely related to the notion of remixing is *fan fiction*, or *fanfic* for short. Fanfic writing became popular in the 1960s with the rise of the TV series (Knobel & Lankshear, 2011), but experts agree that with the appearance the *Star Trek* it became a widespread phenomenon (Jenkins, 1998). The admirers of this series started to write their own fiction as a sort of spin-off, using the same characters within the frame of the *Star Trek* universe, to be shared within the cult community. However, not until recently has fanfic been considered as a proper type of remix (Knobel & Lankshear, 2011).

This sort of writing opens the door to infinite possibilities for exploitation within the language classroom. Teachers can make use of what interests students the most to create their own teaching material. Students are more motivated to learn if they can relate to the content being taught. Moreover, teachers can give the students the chance to produce their own fanfic, which not only allows them to practice their own production skills (both written and oral), but also gives them the opportunity to develop their creative abilities as well.

Mashup

The term *mashup* has been mostly associated to music remix. In general terms, a musical mashup is a combination of two or more original songs to create a third one with identifiable characteristics of the source songs. Therefore, the basic principle underlying mashups is the combination of data from different sources, customising them to fulfil a new function or purpose (Loewen, 2007).

Following this basic principle and applying it to modern technologies, the term has recently extended its bounds to refer to the combination or fusion of two or more programming interfaces and/or databases. As a result, new online applications and software are created, such as *Shotclip*, *Video Toolbox*, *PocketDivxEncoder*, *Mixer Factory*, *MixMoov*, *PowToon*, which provide web-based tools for video editing and remixing.

Even though most of these tools were firstly created for the purposes of entertainment, they are starting to be used by teachers in different contexts. One of the main reasons is that new students, the so-called *digital natives* (Prensky, 2001), are highly motivated by technological devices, since it is part of their everyday life. Given this initial motivation, it is

most probable that students will engage in activities which include entertaining material in forms which are familiar to them.

The Issue of Copyright

Perhaps the most important aspect when working with remixes is that of copyright. It is very necessary, therefore, to acknowledge the source or the original work in our own production. Schwartzman and Odetti (2013) point out that a key aspect is that the freshly generated material keep the identity of the original one, or at least that it should be easily identifiable. In so doing, the teacher can take advantage of available material and adapt it to fit the needs and learning styles of each class.

Even though permissions to use copyright material can sometimes be scarce, there is still an array of alternatives to resort to without the worry of infringing international regulations and laws. Such is the case of license-free resources available in the Open Educational Resources, as explained above, or of content which is in the public domain per se. An example is that of well-known and widespread children stories, such as *Aladdin*, *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Robin Hood*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, etc.

These stories have been recorded with countless adaptations throughout the literary history. Therefore, it is almost certain that all students are familiar with them, making it easy for teachers to use them in their class as a starting point to implement different activities, without the need to invent new material from scratch, and without having to ask for special permissions to use them.

Possible Activities in the Pronunciation Class

The teaching of pronunciation at tertiary or university levels aims at achieving sound pronunciation of the second language through the training of both perception and production skills. In recent years, it has been evidenced that, in many classrooms, a model of pronunciation might not be strictly defined in traditional terms, and that it is important to foster the use of different techniques to be able to cater for all students' needs and learning styles.

The use of ICTs comes in handy at the time of catering for these needs and styles, and it also provides an opportunity to complement and maximise the reduced class time, especially in classrooms where the student population is rather large and where the students come from varied backgrounds and with different levels of command of the language.

One of the central skills developed in most tertiary or university EFL pronunciation courses is the recognition of phonemes via dictated passages. In this type of dictation, the

instructor reads a passage out loud, regulating the pace and breaking the text into chunks which are repeated, and the students write down a transcription of said passage using phonemic symbols (e.g. the International Phonetic Alphabet). However, two of the disadvantages are the reduced class time and the fact that this activity is rather teacher-centred; hence the students who need extra practice find it hard to obtain it, and there might also be a fall in the students' level of motivation.

To address these shortcomings, we propose different activities where the students can practice their phonemic transcription skills through dictated texts, with material designed and produced by the members of the chair, namely lecturers, trainees and assistants.

The vast number of ICT and online resources offer an unlimited number of possibilities for the teachers and learners to embark upon the study and practice of dictation and pronunciation. A great tool is the smartphone, something which most people have access to and which offers plenty of possibilities to record, edit, share and play video and audio material. An activity currently being implemented with some of the groups in the first year pronunciation courses at Facultad de Lenguas, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, and at Escuela Normal Superior, Villa del Totoral, is a joint video recording of remixed classical children tales to practice dictation.

The material provided is based on the principles of remix via fanfic creations. Firstly, one speaker is recorded telling a classical tale, such as *Cinderella*, and leaves the story open to continuity. Then, another person contributes with another recording adding to the plotline but changing features of the original story and remixing the events by making them hilarious, changing them completely, or inverting the roles of the characters. After this, another speaker introduces features from another tale, adapting the characters from both stories to create a new one.

The number of contributions to the final product can be regulated, and they can vary both in the number of people involved in the recording and/or in the length of each of their contributions, to best suit the purposes of the task. After this initial stage, the video can be mashed-up by firstly combining the separate recordings, and subsequently adding closed captions to make the stories clearer to the audience, inserting pictures to make them more significant, and adding sound effects to make them more vivid. The final product is a very rich, interesting and highly entertaining video which enhances practice and fosters autonomous learning, as students start to practice phonemic transcription of dictated passages on their own.

Resources

There is an array of online and downloadable resources which both instructors and learners may benefit from to fulfil this type of task. A salient aspect of these resources is that they are user friendly, so teachers can make use of them without being experts at video editing and without the need for special equipment.

- *ShotClip* (<https://www.shotclip.com/>) enables users to create a video interactively and collaboratively and to share it directly on their own webspaces, such as *Facebook* or *Twitter*.
- *Video Toolbox* (<http://videotoolbox.com/>) allows users to edit their videos, add subtitles, add or take away sound and merge two or more videos to create a new one.
- *PocketDivxEncoder* (http://www.pocketdivxencoder.net/EN_index.htm) is a license-free computer software which allows users to add subtitles to a pre-existing video.
- *Mixer Factory* (<http://www.mixerfactory.com/>) offers the possibility of editing videos online and storing them in an external server. Even though this is a paid service, there is a trial version available for free.
- *MixMoov* (<http://www.mixmoov-studio.com/flex/mixmoov.html>) allows users to upload their pre-recorded videos or pictures, and to edit videos with sound effects and transitions.
- *PowToon* (<https://www.powtoon.com/home/g/es/>) offers its users the chance to create their own animated cartoons and stories or to create and practice their own presentations.

Once the final product is achieved, the teacher simply saves the video in their computer and later on makes it available for the students to practice on their own. For tertiary or university classes, teachers commonly use virtual platforms powered by organisations or companies such as *Moodle* (<https://moodle.org/>) or *educativa* (<http://www.educativa.com/>), although it is also possible to work with social networks such as *Facebook* or *Google+*, which allow for closed groups to be created.

Concluding Remarks

The teaching of a second language can be highly benefited by the new advances in ICTs. Even though there might not be many readily-available online resources which are exclusively dedicated to the teaching of pronunciation, teachers can make use of other available web-based and downloadable tools and other OERs to create their own resources.

By teaching dictation with remixed classic tales in videos, teachers can make sure that learners develop their pronunciation skills in activities which are complementary to traditional classroom lessons. These activities are highly motivational for both digital and non-digital natives, as the amusing outcome does not resemble the traditional display of a story, and also because everyday resources are given an educational purpose.

It is important to notice that the use of these resources can result in novel ways of teaching other strategies such as creative writing and speaking. These funny tasks bring about endless chances for creative storytelling and they enhance free-flow production. By allowing students to make use of these resources on their own, they can highly benefit from joint efforts in production activities. Therefore, these tasks encourage collaborative learning, seeing as students get engaged in assignments where they have to make valuable contributions to a final product, and they also provide plenty of opportunities for learners to develop autonomous learning, since they are given the possibility of working in their own personal learning environments.

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