

Chapter 77

Digital Recording Platforms and Integrated Performance Assessments in Second/ Foreign Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

The teaching and learning of a new language can be daunting for both instructors and learners. Second/foreign language teachers must overcome a multitude of impediments in which to bring students to higher levels of language learning. Research using digital voice recording software indicates that by integrating such technology into the curriculum, there are multiple benefits for both instructors and students. In this chapter, the author discusses the challenges language teachers face and then outlines six free digital voice recorder options that are available to teachers. Afterward, the author advances a series of curricular and procedural considerations for the integration of digital voice recordings in the language-learning classroom before discussing findings from studies focused on the use of digital recordings for educational purposes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of best practices using digital voice recordings for integrated performance assessments and a discussion of new avenues for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Developing and nurturing student engagement in the 21st century classroom continues to be a challenging endeavor regardless of content area given a multitude of obstacles such as the perceptions of irrelevance of content and the affective barriers. Moreover, the high stakes testing educational environment has overwhelmed many teachers as instructional time is lost due to working around

testing schedules in the required content areas (Zellmer, Frontier, & Pheifer, 2006). While few would not support the notion of high educational standards and expectations for every student, *No Child Left Behind* has prioritized instruction in and the allocation of resources to the core areas of science, mathematics, and reading (Swanson, 2010), resulting in narrowing of the curriculum (Rosenbusch, 2005; Rosenbusch & Jensen 2004). The challenges teachers face can be especially

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-7230-7.ch077

daunting for novices, those within the first five years of teaching, because many times they are given the most challenging assignments with little to no professional support (Kalogrides, Loeb, & Teille, 2011) and have little voice in the creation of school policy (Futernick, 2007).

While all teachers learn to contend with such barriers to teaching and learning, second/foreign language (S/FL) teachers must learn to overcome other obstacles such as student perceptions of the irrelevance of authentic language applications and lowering student anxiety about learning a second language. Theoretically, when the affective filter is high, a student may experience anxiety, stress, and a lack of self-efficacy that hinders second language acquisition. Conversely, a low affective filter facilitates risk-taking behaviors when practicing and acquiring a new language (Krashen, 1981). For S/FL language teachers, performance anxiety – the feeling of uneasiness, worry, nervousness, and apprehension experienced by non-native speakers when learning or using the target language – is often reported as one of the most influential factors that can impede or facilitate language learning (Horwitz, 2001; Krashen, 1985; Swanson, 2013a). Despite the factors that can impede language learning, the use of innovative technology combined with best practices in teaching languages can help foster a low-anxiety language learning environment and improve student motivation to learn languages.

Working within these constraints and many others, teachers continue to work admirably to get the most out of every instructional minute in the classroom while trying to enhance student achievement as class sizes continue to increase. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the challenges, which S/FL teachers face, present six digital recording platforms that can help improve P-20 S/FL learning by student lowering anxiety and increasing instructional time, discuss curricular and procedural considerations of using a free and open source software for oral language assessment, present existent research using technology

for such purposes, and provide best practices for using digital recording software for assessment purposes.

BACKGROUND

At its core, S/FL instruction in the communicative classroom is dedicated to the ideals and the practice of developing second language proficiency (Swanson, Early, & Baumann, 2011). In order to become communicative, language learners must become literate in the three modes of communication: the Interpersonal, the Interpretive, and the Presentational (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006). Instead of focusing learning on the four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) in isolation, second language learners focus attention on three parts of a single goal, communication. Within the framework of the three modes of communication, language learners develop and demonstrate proficiency through thematic integrated performance assessments. That is, language learners first watch, listen to, and/or read an authentic text (e.g., newspaper article, podcast) and then answer informational and interpretive questions to assess comprehension. Instructors help guide learning by providing students feedback on their performance. After receiving feedback regarding the interpretative phase, students engage in interpersonal oral communication about a specific topic which is related to the interpretive text. Later, students perform in the target language by sharing their research, ideas, and opinions in the form of speeches, drama, skits, broadcasts, posters, brochures, and even essays.

In order to assess learner progress in the interpretive domain, objective measures such as multiple choice and true/false questions can be used, which, when constructed properly, allow for increased validity and reliability. However, assessment measures in the interpersonal and performance domains take place in the form of rubrics, which can be problematic for several reasons.

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