

Motivation for Meaning-Focused Listening in the ESP Classroom

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Abstract. The article explores possible activities that could be offered to learners in the framework of a meaning-focused listening in the ESP classroom. The motivation stimulated in students by this receptive activity enhances the retention and recall of the vocabulary items encountered in the text in question. The study also discusses possible implications for the use of learners' L1 in ESP lessons of philosophy students and the benefits of pre-teaching certain lexical items before concentrating on a meaning-focused activity.

Keywords: *ESP, meaning-focused listening, motivation, vocabulary retention.*

Introduction. The interactive nature of multimedia learning resources makes them indispensable in the ESP classroom of students majoring in philosophy. One of the main reasons for this is a great potential of multimedia resources to increase learners' motivation for engaging in receptive activities offered in ESP lessons, in particular those centred around learning and retention of philosophy specific vocabulary. It is a longstanding EFL axiom that the scope of a student's vocabulary is directly proportional to his/her ability to comprehend a reading or listening text, and to produce a needed message in productive activities (writing and speaking). Learning philosophy-centred vocabulary can turn out a pretty tedious task due to the complexity of the subject matter and a lot of mental effort that goes into comprehending and analyzing material in philosophy classes conducted even in students' L1, let alone foreign language classes where the comprehension difficulty is doubled due to the need to decipher meaning in L2. Quoting Serbian scholar Savka Blagojevic, original philosophy texts may be "highly complex and intellectually demanding" [2, p. 124]. Hence, it is vitally important for philosophy students' academic success to feel motivated to participate in classroom activities, and one of the strategies efficient to engage their interest could be using multimedia-based listening activities which combine video footage or animation and text.

A brief overview of relevant publications. Motivation has traditionally been a focus of attention of numerous language teaching experts, as it is one of the main factors boosting the efficiency of a foreign language learning. Lately, common use of multimedia resources has become an increasingly common in EFL teaching strategy especially due to its enhancing students' motivation, livening up the pace of lessons, making them more engaging and fun. A reason for that, mentioned by Rashed Alghamdy is that multimedia learning materials "become understood easily thus allowing students to control and achieve their learning objectives" [1, p.2], which is an important incentive for self-study and learner autonomy. In the contemporary classroom students are no longer viewed as passive objects of teaching but as agents who actively control the process of their learning and therefore its outcomes.

Previous findings which discussed the benefits of interactivity for remembering information and comprehension showed that the combination of sound, video and oral text result in a so called theory of synergy [1, p.3]. It is believed that non-verbal features such as music, video and

sound complement each other and promote a better comprehension of the oral text which they accompany, further the retention of the presented vocabulary, and thus enhance a learner's overall academic performance [3]. Additionally, making use of visuals can attract the interest of students to the material presented and offer concrete solutions for making the education process run in exciting and fun ways.

Given the above, introducing short videos in English lessons of philosophy students is often beneficial, as it changes the pace of the lesson, provides a new perspective for students to enjoy a format which has not yet turned into routine, and supplies them with more chances for concentrating on and retaining the vocabulary they encounter in the listening.

Thus, the **purpose of this article** is to discuss the motivation for learning specific vocabulary brought about by the interactive nature of multimedia resources used in the ESP classroom of philosophy students. The lesson in question combined the use of traditional reading based tasks with a short video on philosophers studied in the corresponding lesson, both of which served as a source of vocabulary. Although the video presentation worked as a meaning-focused task, it was preceded by a focus-on-form activity, and later in the lesson the students used the lexical material encountered in the listening text in their post-listening discussion, and checked retention in the next class.

Description of the main material. The sample listening mentioned below is the activity we did with a group of nine third year students specializing in philosophy who reached the level of B1+/ B2 according to CEFR. In the two previous years at university the students were taught a general English course, this class being one of their first ESP classes.

This lesson centred around two ancient Greek philosophers, Democritus and Leucippus. At the start of the class the students were provided with the right pronunciation of the philosophers' names and were invited to a short lead-in discussion to remember what they had already learnt about them in their subject matter curriculum. This helped the students to refresh their knowledge and put them in the right mindset, which prepared them for the actual listening activity.

In the next stage of the lesson the students read a short text on the first atomic theory and revised the vocabulary to do with the subject (*fundamental substance, to collide, infinite number, to be dispersed, to devise a theory*). It

was meant to further activate the learners' schemata of the subject that the listening activity focused on. After a small discussion of the theory of atoms the lesson moved on to the pre-listening stage when the students learnt or revised the following vocabulary which they would encounter in the video: (*Major revelation; Sculpt the way we think about atoms; Higgs boson; Intrinsic property of an object; Impenetrable; To be tossed aside; To be reconsidered; Dormant idea*).

It should be mentioned that the following listening was meant as a focus-on-meaning (as opposed to focus-on-form) activity which as a rule does not presuppose concentrating on vocabulary learning activities. However, this pre-listening stage seems justified as the lack of understanding of the above lexical units could impede the comprehension of the recording itself. Additionally, getting to know certain vocabulary items from the following listening was meant to help students in predicting the contents of the text in question and reduced their before-listening anxiety, which also promoted better understanding. Overall, pure content-focused activities appear rather a rarity in the ESP classroom, due – once again – to the complexity of the subject matter terminology, which needs learning/ refreshing before engaging into the receptive task itself.

An issue which deserves a more detailed further discussion is the use of students' L1 in ESP lessons. It is a widely acknowledged approach to avoid students' mother tongue in the EFL classroom, particularly at intermediate+ levels. The traditional reasoning behind it is promoting of learners' ability to formulate their ideas in the foreign language immediately, without recouring to the assistance of another language (i.e. their L1), which enhances the fluency of speaking and a more English-like construction of their utterances. It is natural then that as a rule teaching methodologists (e.g. H.Sorhus, C.MacDonald, A.Carreres, M.Mogahed) reject the use of L1 in foreign language learning. At the same time, other experts (S.Corder, R.Popovic, A.Fernandez-Guerra) emphasise adherence to translation as an effective method in learning a foreign language [7].

Translation remains a prominent ESP learning strategy in the classroom of learners who major in philosophy. A reason for that could be that a lot of terms encountered in this kind of classes have direct equivalents in students' L1. The operational knowledge of the corresponding lexis in English promotes the confidence and fluency of learners, as they act as equivalent "chunks" of language which build their professional discourse. Moreover, the students' further professional life is likely to be connected to reading extensively on their subject matter and then formulating their own scientific texts based on digesting and transformation of the books and articles they read. In this light it is also important to know the right L1 matches of the lexis they encounter in a foreign source. As examples of vocabulary items from the listening that lend themselves well for translation, the following could be cited: *Higgs boson (бозон Хігса); Intrinsic property of an object (органічна властивість предмета), fundamental substance (основна субстанція)*.

At the same time, this situation is not similar to the use of translation in other aspects of EFL learning, which can in fact negatively impact the naturalness of learners' out-

put in English.

In the next **pre-listening stage** the students worked in pairs and discussed the following statements related to the content of the listening text:

- 1) Atoms are smallest pieces of matter.
- 2) The idea of atoms belongs to Democritus.
- 3) Leucippus was Democritus's colleague.
- 4) According to the ancient Greeks, there has to be 'nothingness' around atoms.
- 5) Democritus argued all atoms were the same shape.
- 6) The theory of atoms developed into the Aristotelean theory of the four elements.
- 7) The ideas of Democritus were not reconsidered until well into the 19th century.

The combination of the two previous pre-listening activities had to activate the two types of the learners' knowledge, the linguistic one, on the one hand, and the knowledge of the corresponding philosophical context. In other words, the students were switched into the two-sided comprehension process of a foreign language text through the combination of bottom-up processing (knowledge of lexis and grammar), and top-down processing (knowledge of situational and cultural context, and background knowledge of the topic) [6, p. 41].

Another idea behind discussing the above statements was activating the learners' prediction strategy, when – based on the offered information, a kind of a 'teaser' – they put forward assumptions as to the content of the text to be heard and later check them against the recording. This strategy forms the information gap by building up suspense, and further finding out the actual information in the text also stimulates its better comprehension and boosts the retention of the information. This finally brought the learners to the actual listening stage when they could check their ideas against the video accessible at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHT4wWwBqQY>. This is just one of a huge array of short entertaining videos which cover a variety of philosophy issues and can easily be used in university classes.

In their article on vocabulary uptake Nguyen and Boers point out that: "The use of newly learned words in output tasks is also included as a desirable feature of vocabulary learning activities" because it calls for retrieval of the newly learnt vocabulary from memory, which improves its retention. Particularly beneficial for this purpose is "the generative use of newly learned words" when learners have to come up with their own contexts for their correct use" [7, p. 8]. Accounting for this, the students were given a chance to generate the first output containing new words right after the listening activity, when discussing their ideas on the above seven statements with the whole group. Out of the eight pre-taught collocations, the most popular with the learners were: Major revelation; Higgs boson; Intrinsic property of an object; To be reconsidered; Dormant idea.

The further recycling of the vocabulary items occurred as part of homework, with the students having to do a gap-fill exercise which included completing sentences related to philosophy concepts other than the theory of atoms with the vocabulary in question. In the next lesson the learners revisited the lexical items again when they did a vocabulary quiz. With the exception of the three

above mentioned items, where they were provided with the Ukrainian translation and asked to give the English equivalents, the rest of the items had to be remembered from my explanations of the words in English. Seven students from the class remembered all the 8 expressions. Minimum amount of the remembered items were five.

Conclusions. To sum up, introducing of multimedia in ESP university classes turns out a valuable incentive to engage students into receptive and productive activities, as it combines a cognitive aspect with entertainment and fun. Multimedia appears particularly beneficial in teaching vocabulary to students specializing in philosophy,

which itself is an exceedingly complex subject matter, and whose comprehension in L2 is significantly enhanced by materials which combine both a teaching aspect and a more 'lightweight' approach of moving images, music, and texts which make up today's educational videos.

Further research can be connected with a more detailed study of meaning-focused activities and the incidental retention of vocabulary related to students' subject matter. Another direction of ESP investigation could be a justified use of learners' mother tongue in ESP and the implications behind the use of translation in higher school ESP classes.

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