VIDEO AS A NEW TESTING FORMAT

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Abstract

Modern technologies give plenty opportunities to education in terms of copying material through a variety of hardware (copiers, printers, scanners, mobile phones, etc.), accessing information in any language and on any subject, participating in on-line conferences, projects and courses and sharing experience through numerous Internet sites. Learning becomes more interesting when a student can get acquainted with the experience of their peers, often living on the other side of the world. In this sense, no other mode of communication can beat video as it embraces image, sound, emotions, sense, meaning and many other things involved, to say nothing about watching as many times as needed.

The article studies the possibility of looking at students’ videos as a new format of testing the foreign language skills. The existing electronic devices along with the collective institutional experience seem to be a sufficient basis for recognizing this kind of project as exam task type. In this case, things like setting up tasks and objectives, choosing the topic, selecting material and outlining general requests (ex., the length of the video, the deadlines, the evaluation criteria, etc.) are of prime importance.

The new testing format sets forth the evaluation system embracing various skills and competences, most of which go far beyond the language skills. However, the final product can give new impetus and whip up motivation in learning foreign languages.

The contest of students’ videos carried out in the Hotel Business and Tourism Institute of the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University) gives good material for the analysis of strengths and weaknesses of this innovative type of testing. Developing such competences as educational, communicative, cognitive and professional subject related is taken as the benefit of the project within foreign language teaching curriculum.

Keywords: video as a new testing format; language skills and competences; video contest.

1. GROUNDS

The development of new technologies has raised modern life to qualitatively new standards. Today it would be hard to imagine a person who does not use a computer, mobile phone, laptop or netbook. You are more aware of that if you work with young people. Copying material with the help of various hardware (copiers,
printers, scanners, mobile phones, etc.), accessing information in any language and on any subject in the Internet, using ICT (information and communication technology) in the learning process - all these can significantly enhance knowledge and experience of our students.

Learning becomes more exciting when you can get acquainted with the experience of your peers, often living on the other side of the world and compares it with your own. In this sense, the university portals, video sites and blogs are a valuable resource. With the help of advanced search engines one can find audio and video lectures given by well-known Western professors (see. the site of MIT http://www.mit.edu), watch the video, shot by an unprofessional person on the most topical subjects (popular YouTube site), listen to a younger of your age, talking about their learning progress, success in science or sports on their personal blog, or on the university website. Sites of many public organizations (such as UNICEF) announce a contest for the best video story on various socially important issues. You do not need to be a professional to participate in such events. You do not require special expensive equipment; you can just use your mobile phone with video recording function. But what is essential is to choose the format that would be interesting for the audience.

2. PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE AND FORMAT

In their English classes, the students of the Hotel Business and Tourism Institute of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University) study the topics of broad public interest (for example, the culture of English-speaking countries, environmental and educational issues, innovation, etc.) along with specialized disciplines associated with tourism, restaurant and hotel business, issues of general management and marketing. Instructors employ a wide range of teaching techniques, both in the process of mastering the material and evaluating the progress. Such forms of testing as presentations, role-playing, case studies, conferences, competitions, debates and discussions are well established in the everyday practice of the Institute. There is also vast experience of recording such events (Chilingaryan 2010: 586-588). One of the international conferences held by the Department of Foreign Languages of the Law Institute of People's Friendship University (RUDN University) showcased students' works in animation and comic book format (Costa, Udina 2009: 174-175), another demonstrated students' video stories on professionally oriented themes presented by Saratov University. All the projects were carried out in English. Scholars agree that videos/movies are a positive tool for learning English. The latest empirical research provides evidence that students feel positive about engaging in technology-based formal and non-formal learning activities (Atabekova, Belousov, Shoustikovs 2015: 511-519).

Based on the existing experience in this field, the department of foreign languages found it possible to launch a pilot project of testing knowledge and skills through students' videos.

The recommended themes were to be linked to the material under study, however not in the broad but narrow focus. In other words, the students were asked to avoid the large-format projects such as discussion or conference, but confine themselves to narrow, specific or specialized issues in the form of presentation, competition, and/or game. This was due to the strict requirement to create a film lasting for only five to ten minutes.

According to specified rules, a study group could participate in the project as a team or they could split into smaller teams if they wished.

3. PROJECT EVALUATION

A board of teachers of the Institute worked out the evaluation system of the product, which provides an assessment of various students' skills, including those beyond purely linguistic. They are:

1. Organization of material/structuring: (introduction, main part, conclusion, duration).
2. Presentation of the material: (tempo, expression, articulation, focus on the stated theme).
3. Language and manner: (sentence length and their complexity, pauzation, grammar, use of vocabulary under study, language confidence).
4. Use of additional resources (setting, music/sound tracks, costumes, makeup, slides, text).

The overall impression could result in 25 points as maximum; five additional points could be given to the best film.

At the stage of the pilot project, we did not consider it appropriate to assess the technical aspects of the film (the work of the camera operator, sound designer and production designer, film editing and so on.). But we are convinced that eventually we could reach certain results in this field too as there are plenty of training
sites aimed to help first-time filmmakers to deal with the specifics of this activity (see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y29mpyRGhk, http://learnaboutfilm.com/making-a-film/equipment-for-low-budget-filmmaking/iphone-ipad-accessories-apps/)

4. OUTCOME

Bachelor students of all years of study submitted to the contest twenty-one works, thus exceeding expectations of the department. The second year students were particularly active; one of the study groups (fourteen students altogether), submitted as many as five videos. As we expected, the students offered the most varied formats: competition (The Most Interesting Hotel), show (The Professionals), interview (What is Happiness), personal experiences of a teenager (The Way Girls Are, What Girls Want), documentary (Wind Power), familiarization trip (Grand Italia, Moscow), company meeting (Dress Code), preparation for project implementation (Management Styles), thinking about the future (Our future), work in a travel agency and airline company (One Day in a Travel Agency, The Wrong Flight), exam (How Good to be Pregnant), and others.

Among the brightest virtues necessary to note is the creative approach to the project: fluent English (The creative trio in the contest film The Professionals - winners of the English Olympiad held by the RUDN University), music (some groups composed their own songs in English), impressive acting (dramatic identification of a comic character, the dean's office employees, flight attendant, travel agent, etc.), setup intake (location of the group, comic postures, etc.), a successful collage (video slideshow), text, and so forth.

However, some of the teams were so enthusiastic about the story that they forgot about strict educational purposes of the project and requirements for selecting topics and language material.

Voting was conducted both by instructors and students, and in most cases the results were identical. It needs to be mentioned, however, that most often the two categories of viewers were guided by the general impression from watching the video to the detriment of the declared requirements. However, what is important in pedagogical terms is that the event involved everybody; it was fun and added value to the importance of learning foreign languages.

5. ADVANTAGES OF FILM AS A NEW TESTING FORMAT

Project analysis suggests that in the course of project preparation students demonstrate and / or develop the following competencies:

1 Educational competence. The new creative form of team work aroused great interest among students. This project allows them to apply not only knowledge and skills acquired within English studies, but also gained from other disciplines (rhetoric, drama, presentation as a form of product promotion, etc.).

2 Communicative competence. The project contributes to the development of communication and business skills through working in a team. It generates a sense of responsibility for their area of work in achieving collective goals.

3 Professional subject related expertise. The main requirement is the selection of topics and the relevant language means studied within the English language course.

4 Cognitive competence. The project involves study of the material, its interpretation and delivery in personal reflection.

5 Foreign language competence, including higher motivation to learn English. The power of positive example set by the best students and sharing practices can considerably enhance desire to do better.

Also of note is the fact that the project contributes to the development of creative potential (script writing, story turns, humor and jokes, use of varied technical facilities), whereas competition, mobilizing forces to win in the contest provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate character and rise above one's weaknesses and insecurity.

REFERENCE LIST


