

Peter Zolczer
J. Selye University, Faculty of Education,
Department of Modern Philology

Multimedia in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning



Many well-written articles and papers encourage teachers to use multimedia in the language classroom. Despite the very clear advantages of using multimedia in FLT, the meaning of the word is becoming more and more blurry. The reason of this is probably the growing tendency of the use of other relatively modern words such as online and e-learning or interactivity. In order to prevent these words from melding, it might be a good idea to specify their meaning according to the intentions of its users. As an advocate of this suggestion, let us define the word multimedia. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary multimedia is: "using or involving several forms of communication or expression". This definition states that if I read a book, I am using a media because it is one form of communications (text). But if I read a book with pictures in it, I am using multimedia because it consists of two forms of communication (text + picture). Bearing this in mind, this article intends to give the teachers an idea which could be used to make the teacher-student communication more effective by using one type of multimedia: online video.

Using online videos in FLT is not a new idea, the advantages of using only one type of multimedia and improving more than two skills of the students was recognized almost immediately after the video had become a widely used type of multimedia. The fact that it enables the teacher to affect the visual and auditory channels, to improve the vocabulary,

comprehension, interpretation and pronunciation skills of the students simultaneously, is a fascinating idea and at the same time a waste if we don't make use of it. Because of the previously mentioned features of the video, there is basically only one aspect of it which needs consideration from a teacher and that is its contents. The contents of the video is a factor that has different effects on the skills involved while watching it and therefore it could interfere with the teacher's intentions both negatively and positively. The possible reasons for negative feedback from the students might be the wrong choice of the contents (topic of the video) or the wrong choice regarding its level of English. The positive effect is usually achieved by a good choice of the contents which in our case is equal with an interesting topic. While choosing a video for teaching purposes it is also good to keep in mind that students usually like up to date topics. The TED community can rapidly speed up the process of choosing such a video. TED is the abbreviation for Technology Entertainment and Design, its website is www.ted.com. The subtitle and motto of TED is "Ideas worth spreading" which defines the aim of the whole project very accurately. It is extremely easy to find the desired topic since there is more than hundred of them, categorized alphabetically. Each topic contains more than one video, some of them almost five hundred. The videos are in fact recorded talks delivered by creative people and their

contents are always thought-provoking and sometimes even astonishing, but more generally, they are interesting and up to date. The language of the talks is English, but what makes these talks even more suitable for FLT purposes is that they come with subtitles in many languages. This way the number of tasks that can be created with the help of these talks is limitless. First of all, the talk and the idea in it could be used as the topic of a discussion to improve the students' conversation skills and deepen their understanding in the given topic. It is probable that the speaker's idea in the talk would be a rich source of arguments which could then be reasoned and discussed in a debate. Secondly, the subtitles can be used to create listening and fill in the gaps activities very easily. All the teacher has to do is to download the English subtitle, open it in a document editor and edit it according to the chosen task (i.e. erase or highlight certain words). Thirdly, the teacher can prepare questions regarding the talk which can be answered individually, in pairs or in groups as well. Another way to work with these talks is to give them to students as the topic for presentation or project work. The fact that there are subtitles for many other languages (probably in the native language of the students as well) opens up more possibilities to be explored and used respectively. Hopefully, beside the improvement of their language skills, with the help of TED talks the students would produce ideas worth spreading.