

The Use of Commercial Videos as Authentic Materials in Improving the Practice of Intercultural Skills of Foreign Language Learners

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“The combination of moving picture and sound can present language more comprehensively than any other teaching medium and a video sequence watched in class, makes students more ready to communicate in the target language” Stempleski and Tomalin (1990) “The language teachers can use different commercials for different levels of groups in the same class, or they can use the same commercial, but then focus on different linguistic or cultural elements which would help the students to understand the cultural aspects of the target language country, where access to native speakers and authentic language is limited”. Mori and Young (2010) Although previous research has investigated the use of commercial videos in teaching English as a second language, research based on improving the intercultural skills of Sri Lankan German language learners, using commercial videos, is not yet being conducted. Therefore, this research seeks to identify, how pertinent it is to use commercial videos, as authentic materials, in teaching cultural aspects of the target language country, for Sri Lankan learners, learning German as a foreign language at the Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya. The research sample consisted of first year special degree students and the research was conducted in two teaching sessions, where one session was conducted using a printed reading comprehension text followed by guided questions and the other was conducted using commercial videos based on the same topic. A semi structured interview was arranged with the learners, to identify what cultural aspects of the target language country were identified in each session. The findings of the research revealed, that in contrast to the printed materials, the use of commercial videos have shown a significant effect on word-acquisition, where certain catchy words and phrases repeated in the commercials are easily remembered by the learners. The symbolic use of humor, sarcasm, stereotypes and the messages conveyed indirectly, through both verbal and nonverbal communication in commercials, have being encountered by learners as interesting and helpful in visualizing the real life situations in a more memorable way. Furthermore, the authentic communication situations in commercials have attracted the learner’s attention, where some were reported to be shocked and have experienced certain cultural aspects of the target language country for the first time, in a realistic setting. The interactive activities conducted at the second teaching session have proven, that the use of television commercials, has not only improved the learners’ vocabulary, but also their oral and presentation skills and have assisted them to acquire a broader understanding about the cultural norms, ethics, values and day today life experiences of the native speakers in a more realistic scenario.

Keywords: Commercial Videos, Intercultural Competency, Language Learners, Cultural Aspects, Authentic Materials

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