Handcrafting Video Clips to foster audio-visual literacy in the EFL classroom

Eva Wilden | Bochum

In diesem Beitrag wird mit *Handcrafting Video Clips* eine kreative und handlungsorientierte Methode vorgestellt, mit der sich mittels mobiler Medien *audio-visual literacy* im fremdsprachlichen Unterricht fördern lässt. Die Autorin referiert zunächst zwei empirische Studien zu a) Mediengewohnheiten von Jugendlichen in Deutschland und b) Erfahrungen angehender Lehrkräfte mit der pädagogischen Nutzung von Medien. Sie argumentiert, dass Jugendliche als *Produtzer* (Bruns, 2008) – nicht nur *Nutzer*, sondern auch *Produzenten* von Online-Inhalten – im Sinne der *Pedagogy of Multiliteracies* (NLG, 1996) eine kritische und reflektierte Haltung zu ihren Online-Aktivitäten entwickeln sollten. Eine Möglichkeit dazu stellt die Methode der *Handcrafted Video Clips* dar, mit deren Hilfe Lernende sich produktiv und kritisch mit dem Zusammenspiel und der Wirkung der verschiedenen Elemente audio-visueller Medien auseinandersetzen. Neben einer Diskussion des zugrundeliegenden Konzepts der *audio-visual literacy* wird ein Beispiel eines *Handcrafted Video Clip* analysiert, um das Potenzial der Methode zu illustrieren.

Mehr Beiträge zu diesem Thema:
www.babylonia.ch >
Thematisches Archiv > Themen 3 und 17

Introduction

This paper sets out to discuss how Handcrafting Video Clips, a mobile media method for foreign language teaching (Wilden, 2013: 139ff), can be employed to foster audio-visual literacy among foreign language learners. First, a rationale for using mobile media, such as mobile phones or smartphones, in foreign language education will be given by relating to two empirical studies on a) the media habits of adolescents and b) experiences of teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) with educational media. Here the pivotal argument is the observation that today's teenagers are so-called *producers* (Bruns, 2008) – not only *users* but also *producers* of online content – who need to learn to be *literate producers*, i.e. critical and reflective users and producers of online content. Thus, the next part of this paper addresses audio-visual literacy, a dimension of multiliteracy which as early as 1996 has been identified in a programmatic article by the New London Group (NLG, 1996) as a key qualification for

critical and active participation in the multilingual and transcultural (online) world. After sketching out the concept of audio-visual literacy, an example clip[1] from the initial Handcrafting Video Clip project will be analysed in order to show the potential of this method to educate *literate producers*.

A rationale for using mobile media in foreign language teaching

The annual JIM studies are representative studies researching the information and media habits of German adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19. The most recent 2012 JIM study has again given evidence to the paramount role that mobile media and the Internet play in young people's lives in Germany: 96% of the participants in the study own a mobile phone and 47% own a smartphone. 40% use mobile Internet access on a regular basis, 56% engage in online communities with their smartphone, and video portals belong to the Top 5 smartphone apps (MPFS, 2012: 52-54).

Especially the increased significance of the smartphone with its multitude of online functionalities proves that today's teenagers in Germany are so-called *producers* (Bruns, 2008) – a term coined to describe the fact that in the age of the Web 2.0 *users* of the online world are also *producers* of online content. This active and productive participation of pupils in the multilingual, transcultural online world calls for a *Pedagogy of Multiliteracies* (NLG, 1996), developing especially learners' critical-reflective literacy skills when designing their (online) social futures.

However, a survey the author conducted among EFL student teachers at a German university indicates that teachers tend to disregard the significance of mobile media in their pupils' lives and do not make use of mobile media as an educational resource in the English classroom. In a

questionnaire 204 undergraduate EFL student teachers were asked about their experiences regarding various traditional as well as digital media in foreign language teaching. The average age of the participants was 24.09 years and a majority of 76.5% were female. 45.1% of the participants were in their third year or higher, indicating they had some prior teaching experiences by completing at least one school placement. The media asked about in the survey were: blackboards, overhead projectors, notebook computers, tablet computers, interactive whiteboards, data projectors, mobile phones (text message, photo *or* video), digital cameras, voice recorders, cassette tape recorders, video recorders, CD players, DVD players. For each medium the participants in the survey were asked whether they had
a) heard of it being used in foreign language teaching,
b) experienced it being used when they were pupils or
c) used it themselves as a resource in their own teaching.

Focusing on the results for mobile phones and smartphones – according to the JIM study 2012 the most popular media among pupils in Germany – shows that the student teachers hardly have any experiences with mobile media as teaching resources (see Table 1 below): Less than a quarter have *heard* of mobile phones being used for taking photos (21.1%) or filming videos (24.5%) in foreign language teaching. Less than 7% have *experienced* mobile phones being used for photos or video filming when they were pupils themselves. And only 3.4% or less have actually *used* mobile phones for taking photos or filming videos in their own foreign language teaching. The vast majority of two thirds did not tick any answer, indicating they have no prior experiences regarding mobile phones in language teaching, neither as pupils nor as teachers themselves.

Thus the survey results indicate a severe discrepancy between the practice of foreign language teaching and the media habits of today's pupils. If schools wish to meet the key goal of educating their pupils for active, responsible and critical participation in society, teachers *ought* to integrate modern digital media in their teaching as pupils need guidance and support to become *literate produsers*.

Educating *literate produsers*: Audio-visual literacy

The visual as well as the audio-visual are nowadays part and parcel of pupils' social customs, communications and media habits. This is demonstrated by the results of the JIM study 2012 as well as many graffiti on school walls or e-mails sent by pupils to their teachers. Visuals such as emoticons permeate everyday life and communication and audio-visual resources like YouTube or Skype are taken-for-granted elements of the life of 'digital natives' (cf. Bennett et al., 2008), a generation growing up with digital technologies and forms of communication from the start.

The so-called visual turn – as illustrated with these examples – has been widely acknowledged (Hecke & Surkamp, 2010) and in its wake audio-visual literacy has been proposed as general educational objective tying in with a more general multiliteracies approach (Elsner, 2011; Kress, 2000; NLG, 1996). Audio-visual literacy is the ability to decode audio-visual media and to perceive the fact that the auditory and visual channel consist of successive elements (e.g. various successive shots), of simultaneous elements (e.g. speech act and music) and that on top there is a reciprocal interaction between the two. Learners need to be enabled to understand this complex relationship between content and form in order to be critical 'digital natives' when for example posting their next video on Facebook.

In this sense audio-visual literacy obviously relates to visual literacy. Breidbach (2010: 68; cf. Fisch & Viebrock, 2013) suggests a definition of visual literacy pointing out three dimensions: the deconstruction, production and critical reflection of visual communication. "To be visually literate, they [learners; EW] must learn to 'read' (consume/interpret) images and 'write' (produce/use) visually rich communications" (Burmark, 2008: 5). In this context Hecke & Surkamp (2010: 14ff) emphasise the difference between general visual perception – the natural process of seeing – and intentional and conscious viewing, the latter of which does not happen naturally but must be learned and practiced. This is particularly important as visual communication, in contrast to verbal communication, is simultaneous, communicating much more information at the same time and is thus more powerful or potentially overwhelming. Therefore, following the

Table 1. Selected results of a questionnaire survey on EFL student teachers' experiences with traditional and digital media in foreign language education

n=204	Mobile Phone (photo)	Mobile Phone (video)	Digital Camera	Tablet Computer	Notebook	Board
	%	%	%	%	%	%
a) heard	21.1	24.5	24.5	34.8	33.8	0.5
b) experienced	6.9	5.9	20.6	2.9	27.5	40.2
c) used	3.4	2.9	12.7	2.9	27.9	56.4
d) no answer	68.6	66.7	42.2	59.3	10.8	2.9
Totals	100	100	100	100	100	100

suggestions of Gunther Kress and the New London Group (NLG, 1996), Breidbach suggests that learners need to develop the skills to decode, produce and reflect visual communication on four different levels: First the narrative level, focusing on the events and actions shown; secondly, the conceptual level focusing on the social context of the visual image; thirdly, the interactional level relating to the interaction between visual image and the observer; and finally the level of modality referring to the reliability of the visual image.

Audio-visual literacy also relates to film literacy. In the discourse on teaching film in the foreign language classroom, various authors suggest recognising listening-and-viewing (*Hör-Seh-Verstehen*) (Blell & Lütge, 2004; Henseler, Möller & Surkamp, 2011) as a skill in its own right. Teaching listening-and-viewing skills includes for example analysing the elements of the visual channel as discussed earlier, such as the events, actions, characters and props on the narrative level. It also relates to the analysis of filming techniques such as camera perspective, camera movement, lighting or editing. The auditory channel on the other hand may consist of e.g. speech acts of the characters, a narrator, background noise or music. *Hör-Seh-Verstehen* may be considered a sub-category of film literacy, which also entails an aesthetic, cultural, intercultural and communicative dimension (Henseler, Möller & Surkamp, 2011: 23). Various authors argue that both receptive *and* productive methods of teaching film support the development of audio-visual literacy and ought to be used as complementary teaching approaches (Henseler, Möller & Surkamp, 2011: 18).

Fostering audio-visual literacy through Handcrafting Video Clips – an example

In order to fill the gap between teaching practices and learners' needs regarding mobile media in education the author conceptualised the Handcrafting Video Clips project in order a) to familiarise EFL student teachers with creative methods for using mobile media and digital storytelling (Ohler, 2013) in their teaching and b) to further develop their audio-visual literacy. In the following, after a short introduction to the method of Handcrafting Video Clips one selected project result will be discussed regarding the goal of fostering audio-visual literacy.

Handcrafted Video Clips (Wilden, 2013: 139ff) are short video clips, created with handcrafted props and popular mobile media, such as mobile phones, smartphones or digital cameras. Essentially they are a low-tech approach to filming because no special technical equipment or expertise is necessary in the production process (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Producing a Handcrafted Video Clip with self-made props and a mobile phone.

Various authors have suggested the production of video clips as a creative method for language teaching (Godwin-Jones, 2012; Henseler, Möller & Surkamp, 2011: 141ff; Mainda & Struckmeyer, 2011; Möller & Plum, 2011). However, this method so far has largely been used as a playful gimmick and its full potential for the development of a critical audio-visual and media literacy has not yet been fully exploited.

The following clip from the initial Handcrafting Video Clips project seminar will be described and analysed regarding audio-visual literacy. Before the production of their clips the students decided to work along a common topic for all groups which was '(Funny) Cultural Differences'. For the production of their clips the students had two and a half in-class meetings (with a total of 240 minutes). Additionally, they spent between 2 and 10 hours outside of class for the preparation and post-production. The great aesthetic variety of the clips produced in all projects so far (Wilden, 2013) depicts the creative potential of the Handcrafting Video Clip method which the participants in all projects enthusiastically embraced and exploited.

Johanna in the USA (Example; 2.35 minutes)

This example clip tells the story of a German girl called Johanna during her exchange year at an American high school. It particularly focusses on some of the cultural misunderstandings which Johanna encounters during that year, in particular the confusion of the homonyms 'dear' and 'deer' and the word 'corsage' as a false friend.

In order to analyse how the clip relates to audio-visual literacy the focus will first be on the first 30 seconds of the clip. The students use various audio-visual techniques adapted from both filming and

The survey results indicate a severe discrepancy between the practice of foreign language teaching and the media habits of today's pupils.

cartoons or comic books to present their story: On the one hand they use filming techniques such as a medium long shot to introduce the setting of the high school or they zoom in on the principal. Also, they use music to underline the story told by the pictures and the voice-over: Johanna's air travel to the USA is accompanied by the American anthem and the sound of a flying plane. At the high school there is a school bell followed by the Imperial March from Star Wars when Johanna is being called to the principal's office.

On the other hand the students employ various visual techniques that can also be found in comic books and cartoons: The protagonist is presented in a two-dimensional, black and white drawing and the setting is complemented through a few photos of the American flag or the principal and his desk. Furthermore, the students use visual elements such as the dollar sign in the 'USA', the maps of Europe and the USA and an arrow pointing towards the USA to indicate the direction of Johanna's journey. It is interesting to see that the students employ an easy-to-use cartoon technique: with the help of a skewer they move a drawing through the scene and thus imply Johanna flying to the USA or walking into the principal's office.

By looking at another sequence of the clip the focus will be on the interaction between the clip and the viewer, in particular on how the viewer is being addressed. This is the scene when Johanna is confused about her host father asking her about her 'corsage' for the prom (1.06-1.49). Johanna's shock about her host father asking for her corsage is illustrated through two drawings: The first one shows Johanna's mouth wide open in a scream and sound waves around her face. At the same time Johanna is clenching her fists. The second drawing shows Johanna tearing her hair to illustrate her terror. In both drawings she is looking

directly at the viewer. The emotional turmoil of the scene is underlined by the shaky movement of the camera. Furthermore, the depiction of shock and fear is supported through sound: first there is an agonizing scream, then a beeping noise to imply Johanna swearing at her host father and finally the sound of a heart beat accentuating Johanna's terror.

In conclusion, the analysis of this example indicates the potential of Handcrafting Video Clips for fostering audio-visual literacy: By creating such clips learners experiment with the interaction between the auditory and visual channel. Through complementing this productive approach through a more analytical approach – having learners analyse their own clips – learners can then be enabled to understand the complex relationship between content and form and thus become *literate produsers*.

Conclusion

As the analysis of one example clip from the initial Handcrafting Video Clip project has shown, this method allows for a creative, action-oriented and reflective development of audio-visual literacy. Thus, this method can be regarded as highly suitable for a *Pedagogy of Multiliteracies* (NLG, 1996) educating pupils for active and critical participation in the multilingual and transcultural multimedia world.

Encouraged through the overall positive feedback and practical results this project has been adapted and implemented in further pre-service teacher trainings as well as an initial school project with a year 7 EFL class. Aside from fostering audio-visual literacy it has also been adapted for other learning objectives, such as transcultural awareness (Wilden, 2013) and narrative competence and it is planned to adapt

it to a task-based language learning setting, putting a greater focus on form and language in use.

Endnote
[1] The Handcrafted Video Clip discussed in this paper as well as other sample clips are available online in a YouTube playlist: http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYdpiojMxm63Zzmaw-xQc8YiJUp342Nq_ (last access: November 11, 2013)

References
Bennett, S., Maton, K. & Kervin, L. (2008). The 'digital natives' debate: A critical review of the evidence. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 39* (5), 775-786.

Blell, G. & Lütge, C. (2004). Sehen, Hören, Verstehen und Handeln: Film im Fremdsprachenunterricht. *Praxis Fremdsprachenunterricht: Englisch, Französisch, Russisch, 1* (6), 402-405.

Breidbach, S. (2010). Ein geigender Radfahrer ist ein geigender Radfahrer ist ein geigender Radfahrer? Kommunikativer Englischunterricht und visual literacy im Rahmen der Diskussion um Bildungsstandards und fremdsprachliche Grundbildung. In: C. Hecke & C. Surkamp, (Hrsg.), *Bilder im Fremdsprachenunterricht - Neue Ansätze, Kompetenzen und Methoden* (pp. 55-75), Tübingen: Narr.

Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage.* New York: Peter Lang.

Burmark, L. (2008). Visual Literacy. What You Get Is What You See. In: N. Frey & D. Fisher (Ed.), *Teaching Visual Literacy. Using*

Comic Books, Graphic Novels, Cartoons, and more to develop comprehension and thinking skills (pp. 5-25). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Elsner, D. (2011). Developing Multiliteracies, Plurilingual Awareness & Critical Thinking in the Primary Language Classroom with Multilingual Virtual Talkingbooks. *Encuentro, 20,* 27-38.

Fisch, J. & Viebrock, B. (2013). Between Visual Literacy and Film Literacy: Working with Film Posters in the EFL Classroom. In: D. Elsner, S. Helff & B. Viebrock (Hrsg.), *Cultural Studies meets TEFL: Teaching Multiliteracies with Graphic Novels, Films & Visual Art* (pp. 121-138), Münster: LIT-Verlag.

Godwin-Jones, R. (2012). Emerging Technologies. Digital Video Revisited: Storytelling, Conferencing, Remixing. *Language Learning & Technology, 16* (1), 1-9.

Hecke, C. & Surkamp, C. (2010). Einleitung: Zur Theorie und Geschichte des Bildeinsatzes im Fremdsprachenunterricht. In: C. Hecke & C. Surkamp (Ed.), *Bilder im Fremdsprachenunterricht - Neue Ansätze, Kompetenzen und Methoden* (pp. 9-24). Tübingen: Narr.

Henseler, R., Möller, S. & Surkamp, C. (2011). *Filme im Englischunterricht. Grundlagen, Methoden, Genres.* Seelze: Klett/Kallmeyer.

Kress, G. (2000). Multimodality. In: B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Ed.), *Multiliteracies. Literacy, Learning and the Design of Social Futures* (pp. 182-202). London: Routledge.

Mainda, D. & Struckmeyer, K. (2011). Who would like to be an actor? Handyclips im Englischunterricht. In: *Der Fremdsprachliche Unterricht Englisch, 112/113,* 1-2.

Möller, S. & Plum, F. (2011). Quick as a Brick. Stop-Motion-Filme: einen Brickfilm mit Windows Moviemaker herstellen. In: *Der Fremdsprachliche Unterricht Englisch, 112/113,* 8-9.

MPFS (2012). *JIM-Studie 2012. Jugend, Information, (Multi-)Media.* Stuttgart: Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest.

NLG (The New London Group) (1996). A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures. *Harvard Educational Review, 66* (1).

Ohler, J. (2013). *Digital Storytelling in the Classroom. Second Edition.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Wilden, E. (2013). Kultur und Identität im fremdsprachlichen Literaturunterricht. Ein Projekt zur Förderung der transkulturellen Kompetenz von angehenden Fremdsprachenlehrkräften. In: A. Wildemann & M. Hoodgarzadeh (Hrsg.), *Sprachen und Identitäten* (pp. 132-145), Innsbruck: StudienVerlag.

Eva Wilden

is junior professor of EFL teaching methodology and foreign language research at Ruhr Universität Bochum, Germany. After completing her teacher training (PGCE) in England she worked as a teacher of English as a foreign language, history and CLIL history at a German secondary school. Her research interests include media and foreign language teaching, culture and language learning, professional development and teacher training, learner autonomy and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning).

Focus on form... on a blackboard.