

Watching a French TV series to learn new vocabulary?

The role of pre- and post-viewing activities

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1 Background

Several studies suggest audio-visual inputs such as TV series support the learning of new vocabulary (e.g. Muñoz et al., 2021; Rodgers & Webb, 2020), and this learning may be enhanced through the use of pre/post-viewing activities (Schmitt, 2008).

2 Research questions

- Do French L2 learners retain new vocabulary when watching three episodes of the captioned TV series “Plan Cœur” (Netflix, 2018)?
- Do they retain more vocabulary when the episode is accompanied by a pre- or post-viewing activity?
- Are the results different for different types of learners (higher vs. lower track, HI/LO)?

3 Method and results

Seventeen target words of differing word class, length, frequency and occurrence were selected from three 13-15 minute excerpts from the French TV series “Plan Cœur” (Netflix, 2018; total 51 target words). A within-subjects design study was then undertaken in compulsory secondary school in Switzerland, where 97 beginner level L2 French students, aged 13-14, watched the three excerpts with French captions. The participants watched each excerpt in a different condition (episode only, episode and pre-viewing activity, episode and post-viewing activity). In the activities, the participants had to recognise the correct meaning (translation) of target words. Three immediate and one delayed post-test of the same type (meaning recognition) were administered to four upper-level classes (HI) and two lower-level classes (LO). We fit a mixed effects logistic regression model to our data which includes random intersects for each student, each item and each class.

The immediate post-test results show that learners in the HI track have a higher (+20%) probability to recall the meaning of the target words than learners in the LO track. **With an activity (regardless of pre or post), the probability of a correct recall significantly increases by 15% (HI) and 18% (LO)**, and there is no significant interaction with track. Similar patterns were observed with the delayed post-test results; however, these were not significant.

d'ailleurs

Lies den Satz und überlege, was der fettgedruckte Ausdruck bedeutet. Drücke auf die passende Übersetzung.

D'ailleurs, chéri, t'aurais pas 200 euros à me prêter ?

- übrigens manchmal trotzdem
 ansonsten ehrlich

Figure 1. Pre-/post viewing activity

According to results:

- Learners remembered new vocabulary in all three conditions (episode only, episode + pre-activity, episode + post-activity)
- The sequencing of the activity (before/after the episode) is not decisive
- The inclusion of a pre-/post-viewing activity enhances the learning of new vocabulary for both HI and LO learners

4 Relevance and limitations of research: Vocabulary learning from TV series

Research is relevant for both teachers and researchers. Research from the field tells us for example that

- Repetition is crucial for learning vocabulary (Schmitt, 2008) and that massed and thematic learning of vocabulary (as is the case in TV series) reinforces the noticing and recall of new words (Rodgers & Webb, 2011).
- Captions are useful for intermediate language learners. L1 subtitles are appropriate for beginners and no subtitles are suited for advanced learners (Vanderplank, 2010).

Hence, research guides both teachers and researchers in choosing suitable material, tasks and methods.

However, **challenges remain**, including

- Research usually focuses on a limited number of aspects whereas **learning and teaching are very complex processes**. For instance, learners implicitly pick up different aspects of a word when being exposed to a TV series (e.g. vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar) depending on their perception, motivation, pre-knowledge etc. It seems impossible to separate the impacts of these different factors.
- As society, schools and **classroom practices evolve quickly** (and TV series are outdated within years), research is usually just a step behind. This also means that subsequent studies based on the same TV series might be affected by lower student interest if the TV series is outdated.
- Difficulties in recruiting an appropriate number of classes is often the reason for research being done outside of the **natural classroom setting**. However, results from research that has been done in real classrooms will possibly lead to more practically oriented conclusions and implications.
- Finally, the experiences and questions of teachers should be taken into consideration more often to define **relevant topics for research**. Concerning vocabulary learning, further studies need to investigate what type of viewing activities are most beneficial, when in the activity they are most useful and what frequency is best suited for utilising TV series in foreign language teaching.

5 Conclusions

Of the study

- Results highlight the importance of pre/post-viewing activities when learning new vocabulary through audio-visual input in foreign language teaching

For bringing practice and research together

- More research is needed to support the potential advantages of vocabulary learning through TV series
- Further studies should investigate what type of activities facilitate the learning of vocabulary and other skills
- Initial and continuous teacher training should include ideas of how to use TV series in the classroom concretely (find material and/or design your own)

6 Questions for reflection

- *As a teacher (trainer):* Do/would you include TV series in your teaching? Why / Why not?
- *As a head teacher/parent:* Would you support TV series being included in language teaching more often? Why / Why not?
- *As a researcher:* Do you know any teachers/classes/schools that regularly use TV series?
- So where should we start? With practice (include TV series the way you think they benefit your students) or research (wait for evidence on what works the best)?

7 Further information



Journal of French Language Studies



Master Thesis



Statistical Analyses



Vocabulary Tasks

References

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