

## **Leveraging Audiovisual Aids in Teaching English Language to Non-Native Speakers: Pedagogical and Linguistic Challenges**

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### **Abstract**

The use of audiovisual materials—such as stills, in-class films, captioned documentaries, and interactive narrative videos created by teachers—has become increasingly prevalent in English-language instruction for non-native speakers. However, the pedagogical value of these materials depends on the coordinated action of speech and image, subtitles or captions, gesture, and learning activities. The current synthesis, based on applied linguistics, cognitive psychology, and humanities-based critique, casts doubt on the fact that, at the same time, audiovisual aids can facilitate the process of English acquisition as well as create pedagogical and linguistic complexities. It posits that optimal audiovisual pedagogy is founded on four complementary alignments: multimodal coherence (enabling learners to integrate modes into a stable mental representation), scaffolded comprehensibility (addressing lexical coverage and speech transience), interactional task design (transforming viewing into communicative language use), and critical framing (preventing the entrenchment of native-speakers or culturally biased conceptions of English). Through these alignments, the article argues that audiovisual content is most effectively utilised as a language-rich text to be read, discussed, and revoiced, rather than passively consumed as entertainment. It concludes with a principled proposal for captions, sequencing, and inclusive engagement, suitable for early childhood and broader English language teaching contexts.

### **Keywords**

Audiovisual aids, English as an additional language, multimodality, subtitles and captions, cognitive load, listening comprehension, vocabulary learning, inclusive pedagogy.

## Introduction

The use of audio-visual aids in language pedagogy is not new; however, their current form differs significantly from previous iterations. The digital age provides instructors with unprecedented access to brief videos, animations, recordings of oral storytelling, video excerpts from documentaries, and videos with subtitles, increasing both creative possibilities and the risk of curriculum drift—where simply playing a video constitutes the learning outcome. For non-native English learners, particularly young learners, multilingual co-learners, and those with special needs, the most critical question is not whether audiovisual input is engaging, but whether it is linguistically and ethically educative.

To initiate a productive process, it is important to consider that audiovisual tools are texts, not neutral resources. Images and videos in the classroom do not merely facilitate language learning; instead, they define the language observed, the value assigned to it, and who is authorised to speak. Consequently, literary and cultural theory is a prerequisite, as it demands that audiovisual texts are artefacts of narration, framing, editing, and performance. Moreover, the learner's experience of encountering English in a video is also a social modelling experience—one involving identities, relationships, and ideological presumptions concerning the functions of English and its competent speakers (Barthes 32).

At the psycholinguistic level, an important question about audiovisual pedagogy consists in the fact that, what will be developed is the input, and what will be exposed only is exposure. The interpretative landmark of the unconsciousness of consciousness in the second-language learning by Schmidt presents a drastic statement: noticing is the necessary and sufficient condition of transforming input into intake (Schmidt' 130). Audiovisual resources may help to notice it by matching auditory representation with visible reference, by repetitive occurrence, and stabilising the speech flow with captions. On the other hand, they are able to hinder the process of noticing through plot, spectacle and high-speed edits that overload the linguistic processing.

This tension is particularly relevant in early childhood and inclusive environments, where learners' attention, working memory, and self-regulation are frequently underdeveloped. Moreover, the needs of learners accessing these environments vary considerably. Cameron

emphasises that teaching young learners requires consideration of developmental limitations and the social context in which language becomes meaningful [Cameron 19]. Inclusive education also challenges educators to provide multiple entry points into meaning, such as visual supports, routines, and manageable representations of language.

This paper analyzes the pedagogical and linguistic challenges associated with the use of audiovisual support in teaching English to non-native language learners. It argues that effective audiovisual pedagogy requires alignment across four dimensions: multimodal coherence, scaffolded comprehensibility, interactional tasks that generate output, and critical reflection on representation and power. The central argument is that acquisition can only be advanced when audiovisual aids are utilised as guided spaces for meaning-making, rather than solely for entertainment.

One of the most prevalent definitions of audiovisual aids lists formats such as pictures, charts, films, animations, and interactive videos. However, the format itself is not the pedagogically decisive aspect; rather, it is multimodality—the distribution of meaning across resources of speech, image, gesture, typography, and spatial arrangement. According to Kress, modern communication frequently occurs through multimodal ensembles, in which the various modes offer different avenues to meaning (Kress 1). Consequently, audiovisual aids in ELT do not function merely as supplementary materials, but as multimodal texts that learners must interpret, rather than simply observe.

Multimodality has the strength to enhance reference and intention in a manner that cannot be achieved through verbal instructions. As learners listen to a command, and observe the action that corresponds to that command, language and world are synchronised to minimise the ambiguity and allow inferences to be made. Such coordination is consistent with play-based pedagogy in early-year classrooms: children are able to imitate, act out, and tell what they see. According to Cameron, young learners find it helpful to have routines that mean linking action, language, and repetition so that meaning can be rehearsed in socially shared forms (Cameron 23).

Yet multimodality is not invariably beneficial; it can be chaotic, overwhelming, or distracting. Mayer explains multimedia learning as a process in which a learner constructs a

mental representation from words and images (Mayer 85). Learners may struggle to integrate modes into a unified representation, which can hinder learning. Alternatively, audiovisual aids may fail not due to a lack of learner motivation, but rather due to the ineffective integration of the semiotic ensemble.

The design's implications can be summarised by Mayer's focus on processing constraints. When constructing a cognitive theory of multimedia learning, he emphasises the dual-channel assumption, the limited capacity assumption, and the active processing assumption (Mayer, 103). In language education, these assumptions suggest that audiovisual aids should not be viewed as merely additional input channels but rather as redistributing cognitive demands across channels. The theory of dual coding, which posits that verbal and nonverbal representations are distinct yet related, provides a framework for understanding why images may enhance language comprehension when meaningfully correlated with words (Paivio).

Audiovisual aids function as cultural texts and, therefore, are never neutral. The selection of norms—such as accent, register, interpersonal distance, and humour—constitutes a significant element within the classroom. Educators who treat audiovisual aids as merely motivating tools without critical consideration risk introducing pre-existing social hierarchies unquestioned. By recognising these aids as texts, educators can pose not just the question "What language is here?" but also "What social world does this language presuppose?" (Barthes 32).

The best arguments in favour of audiovisual aids can be found in those cases, when they are consistent with the language learning mechanisms, including comprehensible input, noticing/attention, interaction, and fluency development. Krashen's input hypothesis continues to influence pedagogical practice, predicting the necessity of understandable, yet developmentally challenging, input (Krashen). Contextual redundancy can enhance the comprehensibility of audiovisual materials; for instance, images disambiguate references, gestures clarify stance, and situational context provides pragmatic information. However, redundancy does not necessarily equate to comprehensibility: students can track plot by utilising images and processing minimal language.

One of the primary limitations is lexical coverage. Analysis of the vocabulary required for reading and listening, as indicated by Nation (59), suggests that 6000–7000-word families are necessary to achieve 98% comprehension of spoken text. A significant number of non-native speakers, particularly beginners and young learners, fall below this threshold. Consequently, un scaffolded, unedited video can generate initial interest but typically does not lead to sustained language acquisition, as learners primarily follow the plot visually while struggling to process the speech. Therefore, audiovisual aids should be designed to minimise the gap between input and uptake through selective choices, segmentation, captioning, and pre-teaching.

In time-based media, this effect is exacerbated by working-memory constraints. Baddeley's model of working memory describes a system that temporarily stores and manipulates information during complex tasks, such as comprehension and learning (Baddeley, p. 556). Consequently, rapid speech, particularly in audiovisual formats, can overwhelm learners who are still developing their ability to decode sounds, words, and basic vocabulary. Dual coding theory also suggests that verbal and nonverbal representations can be associated to provide pedagogical insight; specifically, images can enhance recall when closely linked to the target language rather than competing with it (Paivio).

A second mechanism that is very closely related is the mechanism of noticing. The implication of the thesis put forth by Schmidt is that to learn a certain language, learners have to subscribe to linguistic features in order to learn them although they may later become implicit and automatised (Schmidt 130). Audiovisual aids may aid the process of noticing because they will match the spoken forms with the visible events and captions demonstrating the word boundaries. However, the attention is not an infinite resource: when a clip requires full-time interpretation of action, music, humour and plot, the attention of learners can be overtaken by narration and influence instead of form-meaning mapping. To work with audiovisual pedagogy, tasks must put attention on learnable units, chunks, collocations, functional phrases, without disorganizing meaningful interaction.

The cognitive load theory suggests that rich audiovisual conditions can hinder learning. Sweller argues that learning suffers when the cognitive load exceeds the brain's capacity for schematic processing. He posits that increased resources required for problem-solving will

necessarily reduce available learning resources (Sweller, 275). Extraneous load is generated in educational settings utilising electronic learning tools (ELT) when students must simultaneously listen, read captions, and perform complex tasks, or when irrelevant visual novelty demands interpretation. Consequently, the pedagogical implication is to carefully design the content, utilising brief segments, explicit imagery, subdued background noise, and a slower pace, allowing for pauses and replays.

The final rationale concerns interaction and output. Interactionist models emphasise negotiation of meaning, feedback, and altered output as sources of acquisition (Long, 414). Swain similarly argues that learners develop language proficiency through the effort to convey meaning and observe deficiencies in their ability to do so (Swain, 236). Processes such as dialogue, prediction, retelling, role-play, dialogue reconstruction, and collaborative explanation can also be supported using audiovisual aids. Without such aids, learners may be less likely to speak, potentially transforming the classroom into a space of consumption rather than communication.

Audiovisual aids are frequently defended as tools for listening; however, it is important to distinguish between hearing and listening. Listening involves segmentation, lexical recognition, inference, and the integration of partial cues. Research on captioning represents a promising and complex phenomenon. Montero-Perez and colleagues describe listening aids such as captioning as an overlay within a multimedia setting (Montero-Perez et al. 118). Their framing is pedagogically useful because captions are not merely decorative but can be considered as a designed scaffold that alters processing capabilities.

Vocabulary learning can also be facilitated through captioning; however, the effects vary according to the outcome measure. In a study comparing full captions, keyword captions, and highlighted keywords, Montero-Perez and colleagues reported that captioning groups outperformed a no-caption control group on form-recognition measures and on associating target words with the correct clip. Gains in meaning recall, however, may be more limited (Montero-Perez et al, 118). 118). This suggests that captions can be reliably used to aid form-level lexical knowledge, including the acknowledgement and stabilisation of word forms; nevertheless, higher

levels of semantic acquisition would require further supports, such as elaboration of context, repetition of encounters, and output-based tasks that require integration.

A wider quantitative synthesis supports the overall usefulness of captions, with conditionality emphasised. Montero replicates the positive effects of captioned video on listening and vocabulary acquisition in a meta-analysis, noting that these effects vary according to learner proficiency level and the type of test (Montero -Perez et al. 722). Pedagogically, captions do not represent a singular intervention, as they overlap with task requirements, reading ability, and the linguistic gap between content and learner competence.

Studies of within-language subtitling examine the input and differentiate between explicit and implicit learning outcomes. Bird and Williams conclude that simultaneous text presentation may facilitate the learning of novel words (Bird & Williams, 510). They also highlight an important interpretive risk: improved performance on plot-based tests may be attributable to learners reading more than listening, as they could utilise subtitles as a minimal effort to comprehend the text (Bird & Williams, 511). Therefore, educators must carefully consider what they are measuring and what they are teaching. Uncritical use of subtitles can optimise listening effort when the objective is aural discrimination and listening fluency, but not when the objective is forming recognition, chunk acquisition, or confidence.

Pragmatics and discourse competence are also dependent on audio visually presented texts. These texts disclose softening of requests, turn-taking, repair strategies, and communication of stance through prosody and gesture. This type of pragmatic knowledge is particularly important for non-native speakers, who may have strong vocabularies but struggle with social application. Nevertheless, stylisation within media pragmatics is possible; for example, sitcoms, cartoons, documentaries, and news programmes frequently employ sarcasm, irony, affect, high lexical density, and a formal register. Educators should be genre-conscious and instruct learners to approach audiovisual speech as situated language, rather than a universal template.

In early childhood classrooms, audiovisual aids can link oral language to emergent literacy through captions, on-screen keywords, and story-based videos. However, the literacy demands of captions are developmentally limited, and young children may not be proficient readers. Within

these settings, captions are primarily mediated by teachers, who indicate, interrupt, and restate them, thereby transforming them into a collective print experience rather than individual reading. This observation aligns with Cameron's focus on guided routines and mutual meaning-making in the classroom with young learners (Cameron, 2023).

The selection of video material presents a key pedagogical challenge. Educators must consider not only the intrinsic interest of a video but also its linguistic and developmental appropriateness. A prevalent misconception equates authenticity with difficulty and assumes that learners must be exposed to rapid, natural English, irrespective of comprehension. Coverage studies suggest that unscaffolded exposure can be counterproductive when learners are unable to process the language, instead relying on images to derive meaning (Nation, 59). In early childhood and novice contexts, effective selection has been shown to support short clips with clear visual references, a manageable speech rate, repeated lexical terms, and high-frequency structures. Authenticity can be maintained by selecting discrete fragments rather than extended segments.

The second issue concerns task design. Audiovisual materials can be readily adapted for comprehension tests, involving learners who watch, answer questions, and proceed. However, a comprehension-only pedagogical approach may limit language use. Interactionist and output-oriented approaches suggest that learners require opportunities to produce language, receive feedback, and reformulate forms (Long 414; Swain 236). Consequently, tasks incorporating output should utilise audiovisual aids, such as retelling, dialogue reconstruction, role-play, and peer explanation. These activities shift learners from passive spectators.

Pacing and segmentation present a significant third challenge. Conventional video presentation is continuous; however, interruptions such as pauses, replays, and re-voicing are frequently necessary in language learning. Without these interruptions, learners may demonstrate high engagement but exhibit low retention. Cognitive load theory suggests that teachers should minimise extraneous cognitive processing, which can be achieved by dividing clips into meaningful units rather than presenting them as whole videos (Sweller, p. 275). 275). Subsequent viewings may be conducted in repetitions, with teachers initially focusing on the

gist, then key phrases, and finally interactional role-play, ensuring that with each viewing, processing depth increases without increasing confusion.

The fourth obstacle is teacher knowledge and workload. Audiovisual pedagogy is labour-intensive, requiring teachers to select clips, create transcripts, design tasks, and manage technology within the classroom. Frequently, teachers lack access to stable internet, projectors, and training in multimodal analysis. This can lead to superficial utilisation of videos, which may be simply assigned or used as fillers. Professional development should therefore combine technical competence (for accessing and editing clips) with linguistic competence—specifically, the ability to analyse clips in terms of vocabulary density, discourse markers, and pragmatic routines—and interpretive competence (to recognise how images frame identities and values).

The fifth challenge relates to assessment alignment. Audiovisual pedagogy frequently develops skills—such as pragmatic competence, discourse understanding, and combined listening-speaking performance—that are not adequately assessed by standard tests. When assessment is limited to decontextualised grammatical items, audiovisual work is often considered peripheral. This issue can be addressed by evaluating oral retellings, peer dialogue, and the contextual use of vocabulary through teacher assessment. Such alignment is particularly crucial in inclusive education, where functional communication and participation may be more effective than isolated measures of accuracy.

The linguistic complexities of the audiovisual medium are evident in spoken English through features such as reductions, coarticulation, idioms, and turn-taking speed. These features are readily apparent and audible when utilising audiovisual aids, yet they may potentially confuse learners who must still construct phonological categories. Articulation can be reinforced by visual cues, such as lip movements and gestures, but only within the constraints of filming conventions—close-ups ensure that articulations are visible, while rapid cuts and wide shots may not. Moreover, the interpretation of gestures is culturally mediated; a gesture meaningful to one student may be puzzling to another learner, particularly in cross-cultural contexts.

A lexical density presents a significant challenge for language learners. Although learners can frequently comprehend plot through visual patterns, unfamiliar vocabulary may impede

understanding and diminish motivation. National-level estimates demonstrate the extent of the vocabulary gap faced by many learners and suggest that unscaffolded audiovisual input may be ineffective for beginners (Nation, 59). This supports an argument for scaffolded authenticity—specifically, previewing key information, creating high-frequency chunks, and repeating exposure to a limited number of clips in a manner that facilitates language processing rather than mere experience.

Another language issue concerns accent and variety. Global English encompasses several validated accents and interaction standards; however, mainstream media often favours specific norms. Students may experience anxiety when confronted with new accents, and instructors might avoid such materials to maintain their professional image. Nevertheless, an avoidance of accent diversity can lead to a weak understanding. The exposition of accents can be planned attentively through audiovisual pedagogy, utilising clearer forms and gradually increasing complexity, and coping strategies can be taught by focusing attention on content words, stress patterns, and key discourse markers.

The captioning paradox represents a trade-off frequently observed in multimedia learning. While captions enhance decoding and word recognition, they can also induce attentional switching between listening and reading. Montero-Perez and colleagues suggest that the presence of captions may complicate the interpretation of comprehension scores, as reading can substitute for listening (Montero-Perez et al., p. 120). Bird and Williams caution that learners may successfully complete plot-based assessments by reading subtitles rather than attending to auditory information (Bird & Williams, 2017, p. 511). Therefore, educators should align the use of captions with learning objectives: captions are most appropriate when the objective involves form recognition and confidence, whereas caption-free or keyword-only presentations may be more suitable for objectives focused on discrimination in listening and oral processing.

Genre influences audiovisual language. Stylised dialogue and humour may be found in scripted television, information-laden language may be found in documentaries, and child-friendly cartoons may be simplifying by simplifying syntax, and overstated intonation and affect. It is linguistically misleading to treat the concept of video English as a variety. The teachers are expected to become genre aware of learners, guiding them to identify discourse structures and

learn to realise that different genres are not English as such, but rather a situational register. It is also quite a literary-critical step: it instructs learners that texts are constructed and that meaning is reliant on form.

The accessibility is not a choice. Visual supports, predictable routines, and captioning can facilitate participation in a course for learners with hearing differences, attention issues, or contextual processing disabilities. Vanderplank introduces captions as valid forms of access and emphasises that, in fast-paced situations, learners who are hard of hearing can be effectively supported (Vanderplank, 3; Meyer, Rose, Gordon). Consequently, audiovisual pedagogy in inclusive classrooms aligns with Universal Design for Learning goals, specifically multiple means of representation and expression, flexible timing, and participatory structures that integrate disability support as a regular feature of pedagogical design.

Audiovisual pedagogy is inextricably linked to ideology and representation. Teachers' selection of audiovisual texts, informed by the English language models they employ, reflects which accents are considered normal, which bodies are centered, and which communities are represented as competent or comic. Holliday argues that this ideology is termed "native-speakerism, which privileges native speakers as reference points and associates them with a mythical Western civilisation (Holliday, 385). The reinforcement of this ideology through audiovisual means can occur via the repetition of tendencies to position certain global accents as the norm of competency while simultaneously portraying others as humorous, marked, or lacking.

This ideological issue cannot be resolved through tokenistic diversity measures. A critical pedagogy approach invites learners to analyse audiovisual texts as constructed discourse, considering factors such as who speaks, who is listened to, how politeness is enacted, and how power is manifested in interaction. This framing aligns with the concept of Freire's banking education, where learners are viewed as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active constructors of it (Freire, 72). In language teaching, this suggests prompting learners to consider questions such as: What types of English does it represent? Who permits articulation? Whose language is mocked? These enquiries are not peripheral; they fundamentally shape learner identity, confidence, and participation.

It is also important to consider the impact of English within international media industries and its implications for political economy. Linguistic imperialism, as analysed by Phillipson, posits that language dominance is inextricably linked to cultural, educational, and media power structures (Phillipson, 47). Within the classroom, this manifests as a reliance on commercially produced media, whose cultural scripts are often assumed to be universal. This has significant ethical implications, particularly in early childhood and special education, where representation can influence children's horizons of possibility, inclusive education, demanded of teachers, should be integrated as a core component of the curriculum.

The potential impact of audiovisual teaching can be understood through the lens of media philosophy. McLuhan argued that media reorganise perception, suggesting that pedagogy should consider how forms of mediation structure attention and time, rather than solely focusing on the content conveyed (McLuhan, 8). A classroom where attention consists of constant clip-switching can lead to developing a fragmented attention; a classroom where attention consists of short clip repeatedly and with deep language work can lead to development of slow interpretation and dialogic talk. This distinction is pedagogical, not technological; the same medium can facilitate superficial stimulation or the development of lasting meaning.

These issues are particularly pronounced within inclusive education. Audiovisual media offer the potential to enhance access for learners requiring visual or written assistance; however, this approach may disadvantage those who rely on rapid reading, fine-motor navigation, or culturally specific cues. Inclusive classrooms and audiovisual pedagogy therefore require the design of participation structures that include providing captions, utilising predictable viewing routines, offering multiple response modes, and affording learners control over the pace of learning. This approach aligns with the flexible entry points and participation methods articulated in the Universal Design for Learning framework (Meyer & Rose).

## **Conclusion**

Audiovisual aids can enhance English language learning for non-native speakers when treated as multimodal texts requiring specific pedagogical planning, rather than mere supplementary additions. Research in multimedia learning and cognitive load theory suggests

that learners possess limited processing capacity, and extraneous demands can impede learning; as Sweller cautions, increased task demands should reduce available learning resources (Sweller, 275). Applied linguistics provides further insight: attention and noticing remain central, and audiovisual aids are facilitative only when learners are instructed to pay attention and utilise language in communication (Schmidt, 130). However, audiovisual pedagogy continues to face recurring challenges, including gaps in lexical coverage, accent heterogeneity, trade-offs in captioning, and ideological concerns regarding representation and native-speakerism. Addressing these issues requires a pedagogy that is both scientifically grounded and critically informed. Practically, this involves selecting shorter, linguistically manageable clips; scaffolding vocabulary and pragmatics; constructing interaction-rich tasks that elicit output; and utilising captions as tools aligned with specific learning objectives, rather than assuming their universal benefit or detriment.

The use of audiovisual materials is not solely concerned with introducing technology into teaching, but rather with mediating language, attention, and interpretation. When audiovisual texts are carefully selected and framed, they can challenge learners to consider not distant standards, but a living, diverse, and critically discussable resource.

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