

## MULTIMODAL LEARNING AND AUTHENTIC VIDEOS: THE ROLE OF BODY LANGUAGE, GESTURES, AND FACIAL EXPRESSIONS IN COMPREHENSION

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### *Abstract:*

Multimodal learning involves the integration of multiple sensory inputs—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—to enhance language acquisition and comprehension. Authentic video materials provide a rich multimodal context where body language, gestures, and facial expressions serve as critical components of meaning-making. This article explores the theoretical foundations of multimodal learning in second language acquisition (SLA) and examines the role of nonverbal communication in aiding comprehension. Additionally, it discusses instructional strategies for effectively utilizing authentic videos to improve multimodal literacy among EFL learners.

*Key words:* Multimodal learning, authentic videos, body language, gestures, facial expressions, nonverbal communication, second language acquisition.

### Introduction

Traditional language learning often prioritizes verbal communication, overlooking the significant role of nonverbal cues in meaning-making. However, effective communication extends beyond words, relying on body language, gestures, and facial expressions (Mehrabian, 1972). Authentic videos provide real-life multimodal input, making them an invaluable resource for EFL learners. This article examines how multimodal cues in videos enhance comprehension and proposes methods for integrating them into language instruction.

#### Theoretical Foundations of Multimodal Learning in SLA

Multimodal learning is supported by several linguistic and cognitive theories:

- Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1986): Learners process information better when presented with both verbal and visual stimuli, as these two channels—verbal (linguistic) and non-verbal (imagery)—work together to reinforce memory and understanding. This dual representation enhances retention, especially in language learning, where images, videos, and real-world contexts support comprehension and recall.
- Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1994): Multimodal input helps distribute cognitive effort, preventing overload by optimizing working memory capacity. When learners receive information through multiple channels (such as spoken language and visual cues in authentic videos), extraneous cognitive load is reduced, allowing them to focus on essential aspects of language processing, such as meaning and contextual usage.
- Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978): Learning occurs through social interaction, where gestures and facial expressions play a key role in communication by providing non-verbal context that supports verbal understanding. In language learning, authentic videos featuring real-life conversations expose learners to these interactional cues, helping them develop pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic awareness.
- Embodied Cognition (Barsalou, 2008): Language comprehension is grounded in physical experiences, including gestures and expressions, as the brain integrates sensory and motor systems to make sense of linguistic input. Watching authentic videos allows learners to connect spoken language with body language, facial expressions, and real-world contexts, leading to deeper comprehension and more natural language use.

#### The Role of Nonverbal Communication in Language Comprehension

Authentic videos provide various nonverbal cues that aid understanding:

- Body Language (McNeill, 1992): Posture and movement convey emotions and intentions, playing a crucial role in communication by supplementing verbal messages. In language learning, exposure to authentic videos helps learners interpret and reproduce body language appropriately, enhancing their ability to understand implied meanings and engage in more natural interactions.
- Gestures (Goldin-Meadow, 2003): Hand movements emphasize meaning and clarify speech, serving as an additional layer of communication that supports comprehension. In second language acquisition, gestures function as scaffolding tools, helping learners grasp abstract concepts, remember vocabulary, and develop fluency through multimodal input.
- Facial Expressions (Ekman, 1999): Express emotions and reinforce spoken content by providing visual cues that aid in interpreting tone, mood, and intention. Since facial expressions are often culturally

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specific, authentic videos expose learners to the subtle nuances of emotional expression in different linguistic and social contexts, improving their pragmatic competence.

- Eye Contact (Argyle, 1975): Signals engagement and regulates turn-taking in conversation, acting as a fundamental aspect of social interaction. Watching authentic videos allows learners to observe how eye contact is used differently across cultures, helping them develop appropriate conversational strategies and improving their ability to interact effectively in real-life communication.

Authentic Videos as a Tool for Multimodal Learning

Using authentic videos allows learners to:

- Develop Pragmatic Competence (Kellerman, 1992): Understanding cultural norms of nonverbal communication is essential for effective interaction in a second language. Authentic videos provide learners with real-life examples of gestures, facial expressions, and other nonverbal cues, helping them interpret meaning beyond words and use appropriate communication strategies in different cultural contexts.

- Enhance Listening Skills (Wagner, 2010): Visual cues support comprehension of difficult speech by providing contextual information that aids in decoding fast or unclear speech patterns. Authentic videos allow learners to rely on facial expressions, lip movements, and gestures to fill in gaps in understanding, making spoken language more accessible and enhancing overall listening proficiency.

- Improve Retention (Mayer, 2001): Multimodal input reinforces memory and recall by engaging both visual and auditory processing channels. When learners are exposed to language through authentic videos, they encode information more effectively, as the combination of images, sounds, and contextual interactions strengthens cognitive connections, leading to better long-term retention.

Instructional Strategies for Teaching with Authentic Videos

To maximize the benefits of multimodal learning, instructors can:

- Guided Observation: Directing students to analyze gestures and expressions.
- Silent Viewing Activities: Encouraging learners to interpret meaning without audio.
- Video Annotation Tasks: Having students describe nonverbal cues in subtitles.
- Role-Playing and Imitation: Practicing gestures and expressions from video scenes.
- Comparative Analysis: Examining cultural differences in body language across videos.

Challenges and Considerations

Despite their benefits, multimodal approaches face challenges such as:

- Cultural Variability: Nonverbal cues differ across cultures and may lead to misinterpretation.
- Cognitive Overload: Excessive multimodal input can be overwhelming for beginners.
- Accessibility Issues: Not all learners have equal access to high-quality video resources.

Conclusion

Multimodal learning through authentic videos provides a holistic approach to language comprehension, emphasizing the role of nonverbal communication. By integrating body language, gestures, and facial expressions into EFL instruction, educators can enhance students' comprehension, retention, and overall communicative competence. Future research should explore the impact of emerging technologies, such as virtual reality and AI-powered video analysis, on multimodal learning.

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