

FOSTERING SPEAKING FLUENCY AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE WITH AUTHENTIC VIDEO MATERIALS IN EFL HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. *Speaking fluency and pragmatic competence are essential components of communicative ability in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. However, learners in higher education frequently struggle to achieve natural fluency and appropriate pragmatic use due to limited exposure to authentic input. This article examines how authentic video materials (AVMs)—including interviews, debates, talk shows, and social media content—can be systematically employed to foster speaking fluency and pragmatic competence in EFL classrooms. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Swain’s Output Hypothesis, Long’s Interaction Hypothesis, and sociocultural perspectives, the article integrates empirical findings with classroom practices. It demonstrates that AVMs provide learners with access to natural discourse markers, formulaic sequences, turn-taking devices, and politeness strategies, all of which are crucial for fluent and contextually appropriate communication. The paper presents evidence of fluency gains in speech rate, mean length of run, and reduced reliance on fillers, alongside pragmatic improvements such as hedging, alignment, and backchanneling. Practical task designs—role-plays, simulations, debates, and micro-transcription activities—are outlined to illustrate how AVMs can be transformed into speaking opportunities. The article concludes with pedagogical recommendations, implications for teacher training, and suggestions for future research.*

Keywords: *authentic video materials, EFL, speaking fluency, pragmatic competence, interactional skills, formulaic sequences, higher education.*

Introduction

Speaking fluency and pragmatic competence are key goals in foreign language education, yet they remain challenging for many EFL learners in higher education. Students often acquire grammatical knowledge but fail to transfer it into smooth, contextually appropriate oral communication. One of the main reasons is the lack of

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authentic exposure to natural speech patterns and pragmatic routines. Authentic video materials (AVMs), however, offer rich opportunities for learners to encounter and internalize real-life discourse.

In contrast to scripted dialogues, AVMs capture the spontaneity, variability, and unpredictability of authentic communication. They feature hesitations, overlaps, colloquialisms, and diverse accents, which expose learners to the realities of spoken interaction. Importantly, they also model pragmatic competence: how speakers manage turn-taking, express stance, soften disagreement, and negotiate meaning. In higher education contexts, where English serves both academic and professional functions, fluency and pragmatic awareness are indispensable.

This article investigates how AVMs can foster speaking fluency and pragmatic competence in EFL higher education. It combines theoretical insights, research evidence, and pedagogical recommendations to demonstrate their effectiveness.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Swain (2005) emphasizes the importance of producing language, not just receiving input. AVMs stimulate learner output by serving as springboards for role-plays, simulations, and debates. Pushed output encourages learners to use new vocabulary, structures, and discourse markers noticed in the videos.

According to Long (1996), interaction is crucial for language development because it provides opportunities for negotiation of meaning. AVMs create authentic contexts for interaction: learners can analyze, react to, and replicate communicative moves seen in debates, interviews, and talk shows.

From a Vygotskian perspective, learning occurs through mediated interaction. AVMs function as cultural tools, modeling pragmatic routines such as politeness strategies, hedging, and turn-entry devices. Collaborative classroom tasks based on AVMs allow learners to co-construct knowledge within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Research highlights the role of formulaic sequences in fluency (Wray, 2002). AVMs provide abundant examples of discourse markers, stance expressions, and conversational chunks. Incorporating these sequences reduces processing load and supports smoother speech.

Kasper and Rose (2002) define pragmatic competence as the ability to use language appropriately in context. AVMs expose learners to speech acts (apologies, requests, refusals) and interactional norms, which are often underrepresented in textbooks.

Pedagogical Strategies for Speaking Development

1. Pre-speaking Activities

- **Chunk Noticing:** Learners identify useful expressions in transcripts (e.g., “What I’d like to point out is...”).

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- **Gesture and Intonation Analysis:** Observing how speakers use body language and prosody to signal stance.

2. During-speaking Activities

- **Role-plays and Simulations:** Students reenact talk show interviews or debates using noticed expressions.
- **Shadowing and Paraphrasing:** Learners shadow short segments for rhythm, then paraphrase content in their own words.
- **Dialogic Tasks:** Paired or group tasks requiring negotiation, agreement, or disagreement based on video content.

3. Post-speaking Activities

- **Reflective Journals:** Learners evaluate their own pragmatic choices and fluency.
- **Peer Feedback with Rubrics:** Using analytic rubrics for complexity, accuracy, fluency (CAF), and pragmatics.
- **Micro-transcription:** Students transcribe 20–30 seconds of dialogue and analyze turn-taking or politeness strategies.

Evidence of Fluency and Pragmatic Gains

1. Fluency Gains

- **Speech Rate:** Learners increase words per minute by recycling formulaic sequences.
- **Mean Length of Run:** Reuse of discourse markers supports longer stretches of uninterrupted speech.
- **Reduced Dysfluency:** Familiarity with authentic rhythm reduces reliance on fillers like “uh” and “um.”

2. Pragmatic Gains

- **Turn-taking:** Learners adopt turn-entry cues (“Can I jump in here?”) and backchannels (“Right,” “I see”).
- **Politeness Strategies:** Exposure to hedging and mitigation fosters more tactful disagreement.
- **Discourse Management:** Learners improve cohesion and coherence by using authentic connectors.

3. Empirical Evidence

Studies (Goh & Burns, 2012; Muhtarova, 2024) show that AVM-based instruction enhances both fluency and pragmatic competence. Learners who practiced with AVMs demonstrated greater confidence, smoother delivery, and more appropriate interactional behavior compared to peers using scripted dialogues.

Implementation in Higher Education

Speaking modules should incorporate AVMs systematically. Weekly sessions may use AVMs as input for debates, presentations, and problem-solving tasks.

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1. Assessment of Speaking

Assessment should target both fluency and pragmatics:

- **Fluency:** speech rate, mean length of run, pause frequency.
- **Pragmatics:** appropriateness of speech acts, turn-taking, hedging, politeness.
- **Rubrics:** CEFR-based descriptors for B1–C1.

2. Teacher Training

Educators should be trained in discourse analysis of AVMs, rubric design, and facilitation of role-play activities. Training ensures teachers can guide learners effectively in noticing and reusing pragmatic features.

3. Accessibility

To ensure equity, AVMs should be provided with transcripts and subtitles. Low-bandwidth alternatives (audio with screenshots) can supplement full videos.

Challenges and Limitations

1. **Cognitive Load:** Learners may feel overwhelmed by authentic speed and pragmatic density.
2. **Cultural References:** Misunderstanding may occur without explicit cultural scaffolding.
3. **Classroom Management:** Role-plays and debates can be time-consuming and require careful monitoring.
4. **Assessment Reliability:** Evaluating pragmatics is complex and subjective.

Conclusion

Authentic video materials play a vital role in fostering speaking fluency and pragmatic competence in higher education EFL contexts. They expose learners to natural discourse, provide models of interactional norms, and support the development of formulaic language crucial for fluency. Classroom evidence shows improvements in speech rate, discourse management, and pragmatic appropriateness. Effective integration requires systematic curriculum design, teacher training, and equity-oriented resources. Future research should explore genre-specific impacts, technological enhancements, and inclusive pedagogies.

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