

USING SHORT FILMS AND CLIPS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LESSONS TO RAISE AWARENESS ON LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Negli ultimi anni si è registrato un notevole aumento del numero degli studenti con difficoltà linguistiche. Queste hanno un impatto sullo sviluppo infantile a vari livelli e rendono le classi significativamente più eterogenee. Alla luce di quanto sopra, l'obiettivo di questo articolo è evidenziare le lezioni di lingua straniera come un'opportunità promettente per sensibilizzare sulle difficoltà linguistiche il pubblico generale. Si sostiene che il materiale autentico, come sono i cortometraggi e i video, creato da enti scientifici e istituzioni ufficiali, possa contribuire a importanti risultati di apprendimento. Inoltre, tale materiale è possibile coinvolgere gli studenti nel processo di apprendimento, aumentando contemporaneamente la loro consapevolezza di importanti situazioni reali, come il vivere con una difficoltà linguistica, che spesso vengono trascurate.

● Evangelia Kyritsi
| National and
Kapodistrian
University of Athens



Dr Evangelia Kyritsi is a clinical linguist at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and holds a

BA in English Language and Literature. Her research interests include language development and disorders, foreign language learning and teaching, deafness, education, and social justice.

Defining language difficulties

A common issue of concern in the past few years is the growing number of students with language difficulties, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, ASHA, 2023). These students represent a very heterogeneous population and cover two broad categories (Paradis et al., 2021), which are briefly described below.

The first category consists of children with neurodevelopmental disorders, such as developmental language disorder (DLD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), deafness, speech sound disorder (SSD), attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Bishop et al., 2017). In the case of DLD, language difficulties cannot be attributed to a medical condition and they emerge early in childhood, affecting receptive and/or expressive language skills but also other domains of child development. In children with other neurodevelopmental disorders, language difficulties

can also affect language comprehension and/or production but these are associated with a medical condition (e.g. deafness, ADHD, Down syndrome). It is worth noting that a common characteristic across different neurodevelopmental disorders is the significant variability in the child's profile of strengths and weaknesses. Further, the distinction between various neurodevelopmental disorders is not always an easy issue and there can be comorbidity between different disorders (i.e., a child might have both DLD and ADHD).

Among the various neurodevelopmental disorders, deafness is a particularly interesting case because it is related to a considerably heterogeneous population (Marschark & Spencer, 2015). Students with hearing loss vary greatly with respect to 1) degree of hearing loss (mild, moderate, severe, profound), 2) age of hearing loss onset (prelingual, postlingual), 3) type of hearing loss (sensorineural, congenital), 4) hearing status of parents (deaf vs. hearing), 5) sign language

use and proficiency, 6) preferred mode of communication, 7) sense of identity (Deaf, deaf, hearing, hard-of-hearing). All these factors impact considerably on child development in general and particularly on child language development. Further, a common finding in relevant studies is that deaf students face significant language challenges with spoken language and, by extension, with written language (Lederberg et al., 2023). In fact, it has been argued that 'language delay is the hallmark of deafness' (Musselman, 2000). In addition, deafness can also co-occur with another neurodevelopmental disorder, such as DLD (Hardman et al., 2023).

The second category of children with language difficulties includes those who come from an ethnic-minority background (e.g. Albanian-speaking or Chinese-speaking children raised and educated in Greece). These children often learn the majority language as a foreign language and they may lack a fully developed home language (Paradis et al., 2021). In such cases, children can be caught between two linguistic worlds without fluency in either. In the educational context, these learners are a distinct student population, facing unique challenges and calling for special attention and differentiated pedagogical approaches. The situation becomes even more complicated in terms of assessment, diagnosis and treatment when these two possibilities co-exist, i.e. when a child from an ethnic-minority background also has a neurodevelopmental disorder affecting language and communication (Paradis et al., 2021).

In published literature, a range of terms has been used to refer to children with the characteristics described in the previous paragraphs. For example, some common terms are 'language disability', 'language impairment', 'language disorder'. In addition, the use and distinction of terms such as 'speech', 'language' and 'communication' has also created some confusion both in the bibliography and in clinical practice. More recently, in line with Bishop et al. (2017), the term 'speech, language and communication needs' (SLCN) has been used as an umbrella term that encompasses both children who have language difficulties linked to a neurodevelopmental disorder and minority-language children. In this article, the term SLCN is used.

"Without proper intervention, language difficulties can have a lasting effect on the individual's life."

One last point that is worth noting is that SLCN can affect child development in multiple ways (Botting et al., 2016; Charman et al., 20015; Yew & O'Kearney, 2013). At school, these learners may have language deficits affecting receptive and/or expressive ability. These may be pronounced and get diagnosed early but they may also fall close to typical ranges and get diagnosed later in childhood or even adolescence, when the difference from peers becomes more noticeable or when they affect other critical domains of child development, such as academic progress, psychosocial development (e.g. peer relationships and friendships, self-efficacy), employment, independence, quality of life. Child language difficulties can also influence family life, a possibility that can be avoided through family intervention approaches (Law et al., 2019). In sum, without proper intervention, language difficulties can have a lasting effect on the individual's life.

In view of the above, one can understand that language difficulties cover a broad spectrum of cases. This has important implications for language both on a theoretical level (definitions, assessment, diagnosis) and on an educational level (needs analyses, teaching approaches and practices). It also has important societal implications. As argued above, each student with SLCN has a unique profile. At the same time, the number of children with SLCN is growing and, as there is a tendency for mainstreaming and inclusion worldwide, classes progressively become more heterogeneous. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the general public is generally aware of the many factors that define language (e.g. communication tool, foundation of literacy, identity, index of mental health and well-being), the various implicit and

Video	Scientific body	Recommended level
Think language, think DLD https://youtu.be/MU1inVSISFo?si=djbRniA5qtoCRINZ	RADLD	A2, B1, B2
The hidden disorder: Understanding DLD https://youtu.be/9b7Xp_OJOoU?si=uvxK6C3t8PD0U1Gh	RADLD	B2, C1, C2
What is autism? https://youtu.be/Lk4qs8jGN4U?si=Hjh2f3joQwj-XbIO	National Autistic Society	A2, B1, B2
What is autism? https://youtu.be/MTW7H5UQ8Ts?si=lyA_WZMkvvFk5Yje	American Psychiatric Association	B2, C1, C2
Tips for teaching deaf children with a mild hearing loss https://youtu.be/jylb7TDn2Tk?si=lzXIE0E0VbNqcS45	National Deaf Children's Society	B1, B2
Discover Gallaudet University https://youtu.be/vdBS-vpHMh4?si=Se5pGY_l-fU4f1-D	Gallaudet University	University students C1, C2
The words of silence https://archive.ert.gr/92523/	Documentary in Greek, created by Greek director Loukia Rikaki	Greek-language learners at C1, C2 levels

Table 1

Films on language difficulties that can be used in FL classes

explicit manifestations of language difficulties, and the challenges of growing up with a language difficulty both for monolingual and for minority-language children.

Films and clips on language difficulties

One effective way to raise awareness on the aforementioned topics is through films and short clips, which are often used in foreign language classes (Herrero & Vanderschelden, 2019; Pavithra & Gandhimathi, 2024; Pannatier & Bétrancourt, 2024; Sert & Amri 2021). Especially when these are designed by scientific bodies and official institutions, then they can really contribute towards that direction. Table 1 includes a few such videos, mostly in English, but depending on the video, the language settings can be changed. These videos, of course, are also worth using in the mainstream language arts classroom.

For example, the film titled *Think language, think DLD*, hosted at the website of RADLD (Raising Awareness of

Developmental Language Disorder), provides useful information not only on the language characteristics of children with DLD but also on the difficulties they may face with respect to written language and psychosocial development. Similarly, another video by the same body, titled *The hidden disorder: Understanding developmental language disorder*, gives a more in-depth understanding of DLD through the personal narratives of an adolescent, his teacher, his speech and language therapist and his mother. Similar videos exist for autism spectrum disorder and for deafness. For instance, the clip *What is autism*, created by the National Autistic Society, presents typical characteristics of ASD, which include communication difficulties. Likewise, the National Deaf Children's Society has created a short film for teachers, which provides advice on how to teach a deaf child with a mild hearing loss.

Films and clips are usually short and concise so that they can be most effective and convey core information as briefly as possible. Yet, longer films also exist. For example, the Greek film *The words of silence* (Τα λόγια της σιωπής) is a highly

Video	Task	Level	Language skill
1	"Literacy floats on a sea of talk". Write an essay on the above statement.	C1, C2	Writing
	While watching the video, make a list of phrases describing a difficulty.	A2, B1, B2	Listening or Reading (Depending on whether subtitles are activated)
	After watching the video, describe its content to a friend who would like to know more about DLD.	C1, C2	Listening or Reading, Speaking
	Put the sentences in the order they appear on the video.	B1, B2	Reading
5	Make a list of the imperatives that appear on this video.	B1	Listening
	Make a list of the imperatives that appear on this video. Then, turn them into reported speech.	B2	Listening, Writing
	After watching this video, describe in your own words how a teacher should work with a deaf student.	B2, C1, C2	Speaking, Writing
	Find information on language and communication in people with hearing loss. Write a brief summary. Don't forget to make a list of the sources that you have used.	C1, C2	Reading, Writing

Table 2

General ideas for working with SLCN videos in class

impactful documentary describing the characteristics of the Deaf community and the challenges of living in a hearing community. The film is available in open access at the archive of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation and it could be used with learners of Greek as a FL or with pre-service or in-service FL teachers to raise awareness on deaf communication and deaf culture. Gallaudet University has also created some videos that can be used in a similar manner. Usually, undergraduate students studying foreign languages have little training on language and communication difficulties and therefore they begin their professional career inadequately prepared to work with students with language difficulties. After a presentation of such videos and a group discussion, undergraduate student teachers and in-service teachers could be asked to develop their own activities and material or to adapt existing material so as to meet student needs.

In conclusion, films such as those mentioned above can be used both with children and adults in foreign language classes with the goal to raise awareness on language difficulties and also to improve

FL competence. Table 2 gives some examples of activities that can be developed at different levels and age groups. The examples relate to videos 1 and 5 (Table 1).

Implications for foreign language teaching

In the scenarios described above, films and clips can be used in a foreign language lesson as a teaching tool to raise students' awareness on language difficulties and also to help them improve their foreign language skills while gaining real-world knowledge. Thus, they can be used as authentic material and give new, meaningful dimensions to classroom experiences and practices. Another possibility also exists. Films and clips could be the end-product of students' own efforts. For example, after a short preparation on the topic of language and language difficulties, which could include watching other films, students could be asked to create their own films and clips individually or in groups. Such an activity would have multiple benefits for the students, as it would allow them to combine their knowledge, beliefs and experiences

“Given the vast number of foreign language learners worldwide, foreign language classes provide rich opportunities for reaching out to the general public, for instilling respect for children’s rights, for promoting recognition of the need for inclusive societies and for bringing into the frontstage unquestionable human values such as human dignity, independence and social justice.”

with language skills (in their native language and in the foreign language) with Arts and creativity. It would also provide a valuable opportunity to gain insights into how the youth perceive the world and what things matter most to them.

Another significant gain from using such media on language difficulties in FL classes is that worldwide FL learners represent a considerable part of the general public. This makes FL classes an efficient channel for promoting awareness about diversity, disability, and social justice.

Conclusions

The use of short films and clips in FL classes can contribute towards raising awareness on a variety of topics, which are crucially related to human rights and quality of life. Living with a language difficulty is one of these topics. This paper has argued that short films and clips, created by scientific bodies and official institutions, can offer valuable perspectives into language difficulties and help the general public reflect and reposition themselves on issues of diversity and acceptance, equity and social justice, mutual understanding and respect.

It is important to point out that taking advantage of films and clips in FL classes to raise awareness on language difficulties aligns with UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and with the

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). Specific articles such as SDG4 (Quality in Education), SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities), UNCRC Articles 23 (Children with Disabilities), 28 (Access to Education), 29 (Aims of Education), and 30 (Minority Culture, Language and Religion) are particularly relevant to the arguments developed in this article.

Given the vast number of foreign language learners worldwide, foreign language classes provide rich opportunities for reaching out to the general public, for instilling respect for children’s rights, for promoting recognition of the need for inclusive societies and for bringing into the frontstage unquestionable human values such as human dignity, independence and social justice.

Bibliography

American Speech-Language-Hearing

Association. (2023). Poll shows increases in hearing, speech, and language referrals, more communication challenges in young people. <https://www.asha.org/news/2023/poll-shows-increases-in-hearing-speech-and-language-referrals-more-communication-challenges-in-young-children/?srsltid=AfmBOoogzwYcH1rFooq6vQahqYuyuyvQPMwXD49EUHsP9EQUHVxU8DJ>

Bishop, D. V. M., Snowling, M. J., Thompson, P. A., Greenhalgh, T., & the CATALISE consortium. (2017). Phase 2 of CATALISE: A multinational and multidisciplinary Delphi consensus study of problems with language development: Terminology. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 58(10), 1068-1080. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12721>

Botting, N., Durkin, K., Toseeb, U., Pickles, A. & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2016). Emotional health, support, and self-efficacy in young adults with a history of language impairment. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 34, 538-554. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjdp.12148>

Charman, T., Ricketts, J., Dockrell, J. E., Lindsay, G., & Palikara, O. (2015). Emotional and behavioural problems in children with language impairments and children with autism spectrum disorders. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 50(1), 84-93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1460-6984.12116>

Hardman, G., Herman, R., Kyle, F. E., Ebbels, S., & Morgan, G. (2023). Identifying developmental language disorder in deaf children with cochlear implants: A case study of three children. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 12(17), 5755. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm12175755>

Herrero, C., & Vanderschelden, I. (2019). *Using film and media in the language classroom: Reflections on research-led teaching*. Multilingual Matters.

Law, J., Levickis, P., Rodriguez-Ortiz, I., Matic, A., Lyons, R., Messarra, C., Hreich, E. K., & Stankova, M. (2019). Working with the parents and families of children with developmental language disorders: An international perspective. *Journal of Communication Disorders*, 82, 105922. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcomdis.2019.105922>

Lederberg, A. R., Schick, B., & Spencer, P. E.

(2013). Language and literacy development of deaf and hard of hearing children: Successes and challenges. *Developmental Psychology*, 49(1), 15-30. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029558>

Marschark, M. & Spencer, P. E. (Eds) (2015).

The Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies in Language. Oxford University Press.

Musselman, C. 2000. How do children who can't hear learn to read an alphabetic script?

A review of the literature on reading and deafness. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 5(1), 9-31.

Pavithra, K., & Gandhimathi, S. N. S. (2024).

A systematic review of empirical studies incorporating English movies as pedagogic aids in English language classroom. *Frontiers in Education*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1383977>

Pannatier, M., & Bétrancourt, M. (2024).

Learning from academic video with subtitles: When foreign language proficiency matters. *Learning and Instruction*, 90, 101863. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2023.101863>

Paradis, J., Genesee, F., & Crago, M. (2021).

Dual language development & disorders: A handbook on bilingualism and second language learning (3rd ed). Brookes.

Sert, O., & Amri, M. (2021). Learning potentials

afforded by a film in task-based language classroom interactions. *The Modern Language Journal*, 105, 126-141. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12684>

United Nations. (1989). Convention on the

Rights of the Child. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

Yew, S. G., & O'Kearney, R. (2013). Emotional

and behavioural outcomes later in childhood and adolescence for children with specific language impairments: Meta-analyses of controlled prospective studies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(5), 516-524. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12009>