

Digitizing the Text (Poem): An Interesting Way to Improve Listening and Speaking Skills



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ABSTRACT

Digitization, e-content, technology-aided learning and digital teaching have all captured the educational scene of the 21st century. The present generation is more into tweets and social networking. The teachers face a lot of challenges as the classroom of today has changed drastically with students equipped with a lot more information than ever before. Now opportunities to convert traditional print texts into multisensory, appealing documents are greater. Information highway is flooded with recitation of poems in the voice of the native speakers and even by the poets themselves. The poem can also be digitized in the voice of the learner for teaching purposes thereby making the classroom experience more exciting for learners and teachers. The aim of this paper is to show that the text can be made alive by effectively putting audio, image, graphics and text together and turning these into an i-movie. Once the poem has been explained thoroughly in class, then as a post-activity, learners can be encouraged to digitize a poem with the help of technology in pairs or in groups. Classroom presentations by learners of these movies help in improving their LSRW skills. In a way, asking learners to recite, record and re-create a poem in their own voice is like encouraging them to learn by doing and creatively put together IT-enabled resources.

Keywords: *Digital texts; Interactive learning; Teaching literature; Teaching a poem.*

Introduction

Change is inevitable and innovations with enhanced technology have transformed the entire field of teaching and learning. Education now is not just limited to classrooms but the very moment we Google our questions the answers are there for us readymade. Teachers of today fall between the old and the new orders, and their students already seem more than comfortable in the New Age, but aliens in

the physical classroom (Kress, 1997). According to Goodwyn (2000), "An age of technology that seems to threaten many stabilities also serves to remind us that literature is a great source of wisdom, not solely about the past but equally about the future" (p. 3). In order to be appealing and convincing to this generation, a teacher needs to be updated and aware of the nuances of this tech-savvy generation and make the entire process of learning relevant.

In this digital age, digitizing the piece of information or a text into audio gains significance, “[n]ot just digitizing the text, but digitizing the whole experience” (Farman, 2013) is what is encompassed in this entire process.

Review of Literature

Cotton and Oliver (1992) have argued that though the written word has had a central authority in society and our notions of rationality and valid argument are also bound up with thoughts derived from writing as a medium, the development of hypermedia represents a return to richer, pre-print modalities of expression and provides opportunities to speculate, to debate and to learn in more concrete, multi-sensory terms, which have a deep significance. In engaging for a while with the images on screen, the student is going beyond simple background study and it is imperative now to reject the historical approach which advocated simple repetition of safe and received opinions about texts, to personal and demanding encounters with them, and with their difficulties and ambiguities (Goodwyn, 2000:108). A lot has been said about the pedagogical practices resulting from the changes in technology and “Audio is an important part of any ... project. It adds personality and customization through music, narrative, and sound effects” (Bech, 2012).

There is an urgent need to impart knowledge in a novel way to motivate students to attend classrooms. According to Bull and Anstey (2010), “The concept of text including semiotic systems other than just the

linguistic is relatively new. In the past, text has been seen from a more cognitive viewpoint. However, now when reading text conveyed through digital-electronic technology (such as the internet), reading and writing go beyond simply interpreting the linguistic text to making connections between other semiotic systems including images, symbols and sounds etc.” (p. 9). In tune with Thacker and Webb’s (2002:157) suggestion that “The reader is consistently active as the maker of meaning” and further “The postmodern reader has to be active, and adaptable to the demands of the narrative” (2002:162), it is necessary to point out that a teacher needs to guide the students towards becoming aware of the nature of text as multimodal (cited in Bull and Anstey, 2010. Ruth and Richard (2011: 179) have, through their research findings, suggested that in many cases, and especially for less experienced learners ‘personalization’ works best. Their own voice and narration fills them with a sense of satisfaction (cited in Bull and Anstey, 2010). Bell and Bull (2010, p. 2) have observed that the youth have caught the fancy for making movies and videos and that the average length of each video is about three minutes, and 80% of the digital video clips are created by the users who post them. So teachers dealing with youth need to understand this psychology and the changing scenario. Wagner (2008, p. 188) has said that today’s students and young workers want to be “interactive producers, not isolated consumers.... They long to interact,” and they “long to learn and to create in a collaborative, collegial environment.”

Research done by Goodwyn (2000) shows that it is possible for a student to put the text back together, re-animate it and give it a new lease of life because as a living reader it 'lives' in them.

The time is ripe for teachers to guide intelligently and thought provokingly in an indirect way today's learners who enjoy blogging and googling and are hooked on to social networking sites and use of mobile applications. Teaching is now not just a routine activity of the classroom but it has extended beyond its walls. Teaching now is more interactive, which depends on discussion, interaction and orientation, and more than the end product it is the process which has gained importance. Due to the use of technology, the teachers can now make use of the learners' potential to the maximum. Their work is to guide them towards a path of discovery. Out of the loads of information already existing on the NET, they need to be guided to select, align and apply this information to their own situations. It is essential to motivate them to be creative and put them to use. Rather than just orally and verbally discussing the text, digitizing the textual content or, in other words, converting the content into e-content and that too by the learners themselves can be quite interesting and exciting.

Indian Context, Literature and Digitization

In the Indian context where the classrooms are big and even if the presentations of every student cannot be shared in class, they are free to share them on social networking sites

and generate interest. They would even realize the importance of acknowledging the sources and not being guilty of plagiarism. This is quite effective and stimulating for further research. In the traditional classroom, lecture is the best mode to reach out to learners, but now the teacher is merely a facilitator who encourages learners to enter the realm of self-learning and self-discovery. The abysmal scene of the Indian education system is that learners are actually not reading much but are merely doing 'copy and paste' for their assignments. So, why not make them more active? Why not tune their abilities into skills? Why not involve them rather than make them passive recipients?

Text as a Context to Generate and Create Technology-Aided Content

Poetry is a genre of literature which has been discussed at length right from its content to its form. It has been aesthetically enjoyed and stylistically dissected. It has been taught right from school days to learners who opt for literature as their major subject. "All texts, but most vividly those with a literary or imaginative role in the culture, are multi-dimensional in the sense that they prompt innumerable performances, ongoing rereading and reinterpretations, but also in the sense that their potential meanings can be accessed from many different (sometimes contradictory) perspectives" (Jones, 2013, p. 60).

In this age of Digital Humanities where there is research on the use of technology and its multiple implications within the periphery of interdisciplinary areas: be it

research, literature, cultural studies and the way everything is available on the NET, teaching a poem is and will always be a challenge for teachers as it involves a combination of lexical sets, figures of speech, form which could vary from free verse to a well defined sonnet and so many other configurations which require a thematic study and also a critical study. Sometimes the cultural difference also makes it difficult for the learners to comprehend the poem. Considering all this, while teaching the undergraduate students of Commerce, the idea of placing the text in the hands of the learners and asking them to put all resources to their use and

convert the text into digitalized content was appealing, and the result was astonishing. A lot has been said and written about the digital divide. However, in the present decade, three generations (i.e., Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z) are working together. This decade is marked by increasing number of 'Digital immigrants' and 'Digital natives' and therefore this method can really work now.

In teaching a poem there has to be a paradigm shift from comprehension to expression. The change has to come, keeping in mind recent trends and approaches to learning, and the current educational set-up.

Table 1: Paradigm Shift Needed for Teaching a Poem

From	To
The poem as a text for comprehension	The poem as a means of expression for the reader
The text at the centre and the historical background working as ingredients	The text at the centre but the learner as the modulator
The absence of digital technology	Digital technology becoming a tool in the hands of both the teacher and the learner
The poem working merely as a vehicle for the development of literary appreciation and, to a certain extent, of linguistic competence	The poem working as a medium for translation of one's own expression, helping to develop communicative competence and also driving the learner to appreciate the nuances of language
The teaching of the poem being restricted to the classroom	The teaching of the poem becoming a novel blend of classroom teaching and technology-enabled learning

Hypothesis

With digital technology language learning can be promoted to a larger extent. It is based on the principle that if learners are made active participants, they learn more

effectively. The study hypothesis is as follows:

Digitizing the text into audio by learners encourages self-learning. The multisensory technology generates an

environment where learning takes place indirectly.

Channelizing Text and Technology to Appreciate a Poem

In order to communicate effectively, learning the basics of language skills is a must. 'Skill' is generally defined as "a particular ability, or expertise." Technology promotes this natural development of skills. Now there is less focus on instruction in the classroom. Assignments and tasks have replaced instructions. Due to the change in the mode of instruction, learners get a chance to plan, prepare and participate. They master the skills without their knowledge. If learners improve their listening skill, it has a direct effect on their speaking skill. Appreciating a poem has always been a challenge and in order to make learners participative and interactive, it is important to motivate the learners to pick up cues and guidelines from the internet, mobile, books, e-books and audio-visual aids. "The internet provides the authenticity and diversity of material and stimulus (which should, where possible, remain minimally edited); second-language pedagogy provides the tools for maximizing the communicative and acquisitional benefits for the learner" (Evans, 2009, p. 204).

Case Study

Whenever there is talk of digital technologies, many teachers are quite hesitant and even feel that it is a waste of time and that it will divert the young minds from the core text; the immediate reaction is, "Oh, this won't do any good. You can't have all students do what you wish to do." The basic challenge of a teacher in teaching English is that learners do not freely speak

in English though they do have the linguistic competence. Some of the other challenges faced in relation to the teaching of a poem are:

- Helping learners to overcome their apprehensions regarding their speaking skill;
- Equipping learners with the right tone, accent and pronunciation;
- Helping learners realize the way the text has to be read;
- Providing the right resources for them to be able to comprehend the right pauses and tones;
- Equipping learners with knowledge of the 'word' and the way to put it to use in the right context;
- Providing synonyms and antonyms;
- Enriching learners' word-building ability;
- Helping learners to appreciate the use of figures of speech and the way words are used in different contexts;
- Making learners familiar with collocations, idioms and phrases, which enrich language; and
- Enabling learners to understand the context, content, form and theme.

The author's own experience helped in realizing the possibility of blending text and technology to help learners listen to and speak in English.

Along with classroom teaching, NET resources like YouTube, Google Search engine and Movie Maker were used to analyze the experience of teaching a poem and then asking the learners to convert the text into their own audio-visual production through the use of mobile/PC.

This was implemented using multiple techniques:

- Using NET resources, especially poems

recited by the poets available on YouTube;

- Using Google Image Search to supplement the movies with images;
- Using recording device, be it through mobile or Camera; and
- Using the i-movie or the Movie Maker software.

Implementation

This model was initially used only with the third year undergraduate students and it was not made compulsory. The fast and bright learners were encouraged to work in groups, but later it was found that the same could be used even at the lower level. This model of 'text to technology' was tried with students of B.Com. The model was implemented in three stages:

Kick-Off → Detailed Explanation → Class Presentation

1. To kick off the project, a lecture was delivered in class to create an environment of expectation and enthusiasm, and the following slogans were shared:
 - *Try, Try and Try, and not let your creativity Dry*
 - *Improve your Listening Skill and Speaking Skill with Us.*
 - *Recite, Record and Read, and let the words dance on your tongue and in your ears*
 - *Play with words and discover Your Strength*

This generated interest and the time was ripe to motivate further a few learners to take up the challenge and create the right environment.

2. The second step was to explain the process, which was done in two stages:
Class activity & Home activity.

Class activity

One pre-recorded recitation of the poem was played in class. The learners then had to read the text (Poem). Explanation and discussion were initiated on the poem. The learners had to try to comprehend the meaning. In the process they got a better grasp of the words and could listen to the native speaker and also the teacher. The learners were allowed to copy the recorded presentation. General information was also given about the pronunciation dictionaries available on the NET.

Home activity

At home, the learners had to listen to the text again. They had to recite, read the poem in their own voice and record it. They had to select images and graphics which could blend well with the theme of the poem. They had to put together all the resources and make a movie.

This entire process enabled the learners to listen, listen and listen till they could get the right intonation and pronunciation; they also indirectly learnt words which, through continuous practice, became a part of their vocabulary. Though this was done initially only with a few selected and interested students, the biggest achievement has been that more students have now started reading, selecting poems which they like and converting the text to e-text, which has proved quite effective as it puts audio, image, graphics and text together, thereby having a multisensory appeal. Learning a

poem in this manner is like generating a poem again and reliving the experience of the poet. It leaves an impression on the learners and provides them an opportunity to blend aesthetics, information and technology. This pilot project carried out over a short period proved that, given the right environment and approach, digitization can indeed influence learners positively.

Text and technology, when blended together, can create wonders. We can use technology to present texts in a new form. It is hard to ignore the interplay of both these tools. It promotes research and helps learners to explore. Learners can even be encouraged to add context to the text in their recording and make it a movie, which fellow students and peer group can also connect with. The text in question can be loaded with the background information, the era in which the text was written, the social conditions and information about the author's personal life.

Conclusion

The three "R"s – Repetition, Reinforcement and Reward – can never be far removed from these activities. The learners, free from the limitations of time and space and liberated from the pressures of expectations, are able to optimize the desired results. The resources are at hand and they can guide the learners. Both synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication help them to interact and collaborate with one another.

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