

## **USING VIDEO IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

*Vicente Amado*

*Antonio Nariño HH. Corazonistas and Tabora School*

*v\_amado@yahoo.com*

*Video is a popular and a motivating potential medium in schools. Using video in the language classroom helps the language teachers in many different ways. Video, for instance, brings the outside world into the language classroom, providing the class with many different topics and reasons to talk about. It can provide comprehensible input to the learners through contextualised models of language use. It also offers good opportunities to introduce native English speech into the language classroom. Through this article I will try to show what the benefits of using video are and, at the end, I present an instrument to select and classify video materials.*

### **1. The benefits of video in the language classroom**

The same principles and benefits we have when developing listening activities apply to video: we get familiar with different varieties and accents of spoken language; we acquire language subconsciously even when we are not requested to pay attention to its special features, and we develop awareness of pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, pitch and stress. Nonetheless, video is richer than audio tape. As Harmer (1998) points out, speakers can be seen, background information can be filled in visually, and paralinguistic features such as body movements, clothes people wear, and their location, help us grasp meaning. Likewise,

video contributes to the development of grammatical, sociolinguistic and discourse competencies, among others. In the following paragraphs I briefly describe the advantages of using video in the language.

#### **1.1 The language system**

Video presents language being used in all its aspects (grammar, vocabulary, communicative functions, pronunciation and intonation) (Bouman: 1986, 14). In the sociolinguistic area, it should be pointed out that the immediacy of video helps to show social interaction, its visual setting and the socio-linguistic factors that are vitally important in determining which language should be used in a particular social situation (Bury: 1983).

#### **1.2 Paralinguistic features**

As said before, video provides a truer representation of a communicative event (Hick et al: 1982) where paralinguistic or non-verbal features of face-to-face communication such as gestures, postures, eye contact, closeness of one speaker to another, facial expression, form an integral part of the communicative process (Bury: 1983).

#### **1.3 Listening**

Video provides practice in listening comprehension (Sheering: 1982) and shows

English spoken at a normal or near-normal speed, introducing a variety of different accents, speech patterns, and voice types (Hall: 1986). As Bury (1983: ii) points out, "if the materials have immediate visual impact, then learners will naturally want to talk about them".

#### 1.4 Language experience

Video enriches the student's experience of language and helps him to continue learning from TV and video on his own (Willis: 1983).

#### 1.5 Contextualisation

Tomalin (1986) and Hick et al. (1982) see video as a diverting and motivating tool that contextualises language better than anything else using a combination of sound and moving pictures where the language learner sees and hears the various characters using the target language in varied situations.

#### 1.6 Discourse

For Hick et al. (1982) video can present discourse features such as the organisation of information in a speech with hesitations, pauses, repetition, restatement, etc.

### 2. ELT Video: Advantages and limitations

According to Lonergan (1984), the merit of ELT video materials is that they are planned and produced for a language-learning audience. Using ELT video material in the classroom has been proved to be of great advantage in helping the development of language abilities in students. However, it also has been shown that some limitations have to be faced when video is used as a teaching aid.

Lonergan also sees the fact that the vast majority of viewers watch for relaxation and entertainment and that the medium makes no demands on them. That is a limitation in the use of video as a teaching aid. On the other hand, the reciprocity of discourse is a missing element in the learner's response to video materials as face-to-face interaction is not possible

Other limitations of ELT video materials have been pointed out by Porter and Roberts (1981: 37), as follows:

- **Intonation:** Intonation is marked by unusually wide and unusually frequent pitch movement, as opposed to spontaneous speech which "is jerky, has frequent pauses and overlaps, goes intermittently faster and slower, louder and softer, higher and lower" (Ur: 1984, 9).

- **Enunciation:** Speakers tend to enunciate words with excessive precision; assimilation and elision are minimal.

- **Structural repetition:** Some structures/functions are repeated very often.

- **Complete sentences:** Speakers express themselves in neat, simple, rather short, well-formed sentences. This type of speech does not give a good model of spoken language, as Brown and Yule (1983: 26) observe, "yet native speakers typically produce bursts of speech which are much more readily relatable to phrase -typically shorter than sentences, and only loosely strung together".

- **Distinct turn-taking:** One speaker waits until the other has finished, a situation not common in real life where there is, in fact, some overlap between speakers including interruptions.

- **Pace:** Often ELT texts have a uniform and typically slow pace, whereas in normal speech the speakers adjust their speech according to the situation, their knowledge of the topic, their mood, etc.

- **Quantity:** Speakers usually say the same amount of utterances.

- **Attention signals:** The hesitation (er...you know...) and attention signals (uhuh... mmm...) are missing. In natural conversation these 'fillers' as Brown and Yule (1983) call them, help the interlocutor to make it clear that he has taken up his turn or intends to continue but needs to plan what to say.

- **Formality:** There is a great deal of standardised language; slang and swearing are very rare.

- **Limited vocabulary:** Vocabulary is restricted and specific whereas in natural speech there is usually a great deal of non-specific, general vocabulary, e.g. chap, guy, fellow, etc to refer to a male person (Brown and Yule: *ibid*).

- **Mutilation:** Texts are mutilated or isolated from their context (noise reduction, limited number of characters, etc). "Such 'mutilation of the message' is, however, a natural and integral part of the authentic listening experience" (Porter and Roberts: 1981, 38), where the listener tries to 'clean up' the text of distracting noise, concentrating his attention only on the message.

### 3. The type of materials available

The first type is those materials specially made for language students. The second type is those videos made for general educational

purposes whose main aim is the subject matter. The third type includes those off-air TV programmes videotaped and used as a teaching aid. In order to ensure adequate selection of video material we can use evaluation forms like the one included in annex I. In preparing this scheme I have relied heavily on Joiner's model (1990). It should be pointed out that by using evaluation frameworks to select video materials, we can make sure we examine general, technical, and linguistic and paralinguistic features.

## 4. Suggested stages for video use

### 4.1 Pre-viewing activities

During this stage students should be introduced to situations that generate expectations that will be useful in anticipating and predicting the content of the scene that will be seen. One way to introduce them to such situations is by giving them pre-viewing questions to help them approach the text with certain schemata in mind. The purpose of this stage is to create an atmosphere to viewing and to guide the learner to watch with a purpose.

### 4.2 While viewing activities

The purpose of these activities is to help guide students' comprehension while viewing. The students are asked to focus their attention on specific information. This activity is followed by one or more selective viewing tasks where students are asked to search for information and record it in some way, usually by completing a grid, ticking a box, drawing, etc. (Maley and Moulding: 1981). This stage includes techniques such as silent viewing, listening with no picture, guessing, predicting, checking, interpreting and matching.

### 4.3 Post-viewing activities

These activities have multiple purposes: To check whether the students have understood what they needed to understand and whether they have completed whatever while-viewing task has been set successfully (Underwood: 1989) and to broaden discussion of the topic or language of the viewing text, and perhaps transfer things learned to another context. Post-viewing activities also attempt to guide students' discussion of what they have seen or heard in the video sequence and to provide controlled language practice related to the video. Finally, these activities give the students the opportunity to consider the attitude and manner of the participants of the video sequence (Underwood: 1989).

### 5. Some techniques to exploit video material

Popular techniques include silent viewing, listening with no picture, prediction, description, freeze frame, role playing, guessing, jigsaw viewing and listening.

- **Sound only:** The listening with no picture activity is the opposite technique to silent viewing. It "emphasises the importance of the contribution of the visual element to understanding and context" (Loneragan: 1984, 76).

- **Jigsaw viewing and listening:** Half of the class watches the sequence without sound while the other half listens to the sound with no picture.

- **Predicting:** The teacher shows a short scene stopping it at particular points. The students are asked to say what is going to be said or done next.

- **Role play:** As (Watcyn-Jones: 1983) says, the aim of role play is to give students realistic practice in performing tasks which they may encounter outside the classroom; and to allow them to use language in a much freer way.

- **Description:** Half of the class sees and listens to the scene while the other half only listens. Then the ones who listened describe what happened to the others. The students who saw and heard the scene tell the listeners how accurate their description is. After the discussion the scene is shown again to the entire class.

- **Freeze frame:** This technique is useful to direct students' attention to gestures, facial expressions or movements which indicate mood or feelings. It allows a more detailed discussion of a particular action or gesture.

- **Guessing (What are they thinking? What are they feeling?):** Before viewing the sequence the teacher asks the students to look for kinds of emotions speakers can reveal, or what their thoughts are.

### Conclusions

As shown above, video offers more possibilities of class activities to the language teacher than any other teaching aid. It gives the teacher the opportunity to change the routine and get more students involved in the class participating actively which could help to change the students' attitude to English. Once this goal is reached, better results can be expected.

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**Annex I: EVALUATION SCHEME**

(Based on Joiner's model: 1990)

**I. BASIC INFORMATION** Title of the video

course: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of the sequence: \_\_\_\_\_

Length: \_\_\_\_\_

Format/standard: VHS  BETAMAX  UMATIC/PAL  SECAM  NTSC

Aids: What aids does it have? Tick where appropriate.

Script

Study guide

Teacher's guide

Suggested segmentation

Test

Audio cassettes

Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**II. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS**

**Tick the word/phrases that apply.**

**Category**

To which of the following categories does the sequence belong to?

Oral communication

Cultural information

Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Purpose**

**What is the purpose of the text?**

to inform

to instruct

to entertain

to persuade

to provoke

to stimulate

**Target group**

Is it intended for general English students?

Is it intended for English for specific purposes Students?

**Linguistic and cultural assumptions with respect to viewers/listeners**

**Is it addressed to** beginners

Intermediate

Advance

Native speakers

Do the students need to be familiarized with the culture?

Can it be used to teach culture?

### III. TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Tick the words that apply.

#### Quality of images

Blurred

Too contrasted

Too bright

Clear

#### Quality of sound track

Inaudible

Noisy

Sharp

#### Editing of video

Non-professional

Professional

### IV. LINGUISTIC AND PARALINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS

#### Image

Tick where appropriate.

#### Society

The society is depicted as:

Historical

Old fashioned

Up-to-date

#### Body language

Are the gestures and body language

Spontaneous?

Rehearsed?

Overacted?

Credible?

#### Clothes

Does the type of clothes tell the viewers something about the role and social status of the characters?

#### Sociocultural groups

What levels of society can you identify? \_\_\_\_\_

What age groups are presented? \_\_\_\_\_

What professions and occupations? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Setting

Can the setting be easily identified? Yes — No —

#### Movement

Does it help to understand the text?

Does it act as distracter?

Does the sequence have 'stills'?

**Speakers**

How many speakers are on screen?

one \_\_\_ two \_\_\_ more than two \_\_\_

**V. SOUND TRACK/SCRIPT****Tick where appropriate.**

Rate of delivery

Slow \_\_\_\_

Fairly slow \_\_\_

Normal \_\_\_

Fast \_\_\_

Very fast \_\_\_

**Quality of articulation**

Incomprehensible \_\_\_\_

Fairly comprehensible \_\_\_

Clear \_\_\_

Very clear \_\_\_

**Voiceover (off screen) narration**

No use of voice over \_\_\_

Very little use of voice over \_\_\_

Frequent use of voice over \_\_\_

Extensive use of voice over \_\_\_

**Density of language**

Is the flow controlled? \_\_\_

uncontrolled? \_\_\_

Does 'turn taking' sound natural? \_\_\_

unnatural? \_\_\_

**Music/sound effects**

Do the music/sound effects

help comprehension? \_\_\_

act as distracters? \_\_\_

**Relationship between image sound**

The visual support: Matches the verbal commentary \_\_\_

Conflicts with the verbal commentary \_\_\_

Acts as a distracter \_\_\_

Can stand by itself \_\_\_

Is essential for the verbal commentary \_\_\_

**The verbal support**

The message is primarily verbal? \_\_\_

The verbal support is helpful? \_\_\_

acts as a distracter \_\_\_

is essential \_\_\_



The verbal and the visual support are redundant? \_\_\_\_  
 complementary? \_\_\_\_

## VI. LANGUAGE CONTEXT

### Language system

Is the sequence useful to teach:

Phonology

(specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Grammar What structures: \_\_\_\_\_

Vocabulary What items: \_\_\_\_\_

Which language functions can be taught through the sequence?

Name them: \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of English is taught? British \_\_\_\_ American \_\_\_\_

### Accent

R.P pronunciation \_\_\_\_

Regional \_\_\_\_

Mixed \_\_\_\_

### Register

Is the language used:

Formal \_\_\_\_

Informal \_\_\_\_

Familiar \_\_\_\_

Technical \_\_\_\_

Other(specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### Types of spoken language

Is the speech natural? \_\_\_\_

Is the speech limited by the topic? \_\_\_\_

Is it written to be orally presented? \_\_\_\_

Is it a rehearsed script? \_\_\_\_

### Syllabus

Does it fit into the syllabus? \_\_\_\_

Is it useful to reach the goals? \_\_\_\_

motivate the students? \_\_\_\_

### Class time

How much class time should it take up? \_\_\_\_\_