

Video, DVD and TV. Authentic and adapted aural materials

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Introduction

Video literacy combines particularly well with work on a foreign language since the relationship between the pictures and the language directs powerful attention to the language.

It must be noticed that video is not just a glorified version of audiotape or just ‘listening with pictures’. Actually, there are certain reasons why video can add a special, *extra-dimension to the learning experience*:

- *Seeing language-in-use*: one of the main advantages of video is that students do not just hear language, they see it too. This aids comprehension as we are provided with paralinguistic features such as gestures, expressions (body language), and other visual clues. We can even observe how intonation can match facial expression.
- *Cross-cultural awareness*: the use of video in the classroom allows students to look at situations far beyond their classrooms. It is a good chance to see certain things that otherwise would be impossible for them to witness.
- *The power of creation*: when students use video cameras themselves they are given the potential to create something memorable and enjoyable. The task of video-making can provoke genuinely creative and communicative uses of the language.
- *Motivation*: most students show an increased level of interest when they have a chance to see language in use as well as hear it.

Also, we have to be aware of some **potential problems**:

- The ‘nothing new’ syndrome: we have to provide video activities that are unique learning experiences and do not just replicate home television viewings.
- Poor quality tapes and disks: poorly filmed and woodenly acted material will not engage students.
- Poor viewing conditions: we have to be sure that students can see and hear the video. The monitor must be big enough and it would be better to dim the ambient light for the picture to be clear.
- Stop and start: some students become frustrated when teachers constantly stop and start the video. Sometimes this is done on purpose (to arise creativity or predictions), but at other times some teachers fail to take students’ natural curiosity into account.
- The length of extracts: some people think that more than two or three minutes of video sends students to sleep. Others, however, like to show students whole programmes. Short video sequences of between one and four minutes can yield a number of exercises, demonstrate a satisfying range of language, are easier to manipulate, and can be highly motivating. Where we want to use longer ones we will need to design activities to keep our students involved.
- Fingers and thumbs: students can be irritated by teachers who cannot find what they want or get back to where they have just been on the tape or disk. We have to familiarise ourselves with the system we’re using.

Now let's concentrate on the different **types of videos**:

- *Off-air programmes*: programmes recorded from a television channel should be engaging for our students, comprehensible and of a sensible length. The best ones are ones which we can use for a range of activities including prediction, cross-cultural awareness, teaching language, or as spurs for the students' own creativity. It is important to be aware of the copyright restrictions, as breaking those laws can have serious consequences.
- *Real-world video*: it is good to use videotape materials such as feature films, exercise 'manuals', wildlife documentaries or comedy provided that there are no copyrights restrictions for doing this. We have to choose the activity in terms of length, engagement, comprehensibility and multi-use potential.
- *Language learning videos*: many publishers now produce free-standing language learning videos or videos to accompany coursebooks. Their main advantage is that they have been designed for students in a particular level, with a comprehensible language and interesting topics. On the other hand, their production is usually poor, the situations and the language are inauthentic, or the content is too unsophisticated.

How to include video in the lesson?

Whole-lesson video

Where there are no copyright restrictions, teachers can record programmes off-air and base a whole-class sequence around them: starting, for instance, with a discussion about the topic of the excerpt we want to play, focusing on certain key vocabulary and/or doing some prediction exercises based on what the students are going to see. They then watch and listen for gist, and afterwards –after a second viewing– they can be asked for some detailed information (e.g. particular uses of the language). To finish the lesson, some follow-up activities can be carried out: writing a review of the programme, a role-play concerning its content, discussing the pros and cons of the topic it dealt with, or writing letters to the programme makers.

The video programme has become the main text for a topic-focused lesson.

Video as part of a lesson

We can use a short video extract to illustrate the topic we are working on, to highlight language points, or to settle a class after a noisy activity.

- **Topic**: to introduce a short two- or three-minute video extract into a lesson devoted to a particular topic.
- **Language**: the lesson can be greatly enhanced by a video extract which shows the area of language the class is working on (e.g. grammar, functions, lexis) in operation.
- **Relaxation**: video can occasionally be used for relaxation, but this use must not be overdone since, as we usually need to make it an active process. We might play a music video at the end of a long lesson, or as a bridge between a noisy activity and a quiet one.

Self-access video

Students can also watch videos at home. This will be especially useful where there are worksheets and related material for them to work with. In this way, students may feel encouraged to make the most of self-access viewing rather than watching without any special purpose.

Common video teaching techniques

Viewing techniques

They are designed to awaken the students' curiosity and to arise their expectations by means of prediction activities.

- *Fast forward*: the teacher presses the 'play' button and then fast forwards the video so that the sequence shoots pass silently and at great speed. Students are to tell what the extract was about and they can also guess what the characters were saying.
- *Play backwards*: the teacher proceeds the same as before, but in the reverse way. Then the students have to reconstruct the story trying also to guess the soundtrack.

Activity: select two short movie sequences (20-30 sec.) to carry out each of these techniques, respectively.

- *Silent viewing (for language)*: the teacher plays the tape at normal speed, but without the sound. Students have to guess what the characters are saying, then the tape is played with sound to check if they guesses correctly.

Activity: 'Split moves'

- *Silent viewing (for music)*: the same procedure as before, but now applied to music. Students have to say what kind of music they would put behind the sequence and why. Then we check if they chose the same mood as the director/composer.

Activity: 'Split moves' (adapted to music; no need to be carried out)

- *Freeze frame*: at any stage during a video sequence we can freeze the picture, then we can ask students what they think will happen next or what the character will say next.

Activity: we show a number of frozen images corresponding to several sequences (2, 3 maximum). This activity could be focused on the practise of present perfect tense (e.g. s/he has just...) and future tenses (e.g. and now s/he is going to / will...).

- *Partial viewing*: we allow students only a partial view of the pictures on the screen. We can use pieces of card to cover most of the screen, and then remove them one-by-one to so that what is happening is only gradually revealed.
Variation: we could use a large divider to let half the class only see half of the screen, while the rest can see the other half. They have to guess what the other half of the class is seeing.

Listening (and mixed) techniques

These are similarly designed to provoke engagement and expectations.

- *Pictureless listening (language)*: the teacher covers the screen; the students then listen to a dialogue and have to guess such things as where it is taking place and who the speakers are (age, appearance, etc.).

Activity: 'Split moves'

- *Pictureless listening (music)*: students can listen to the music track of some excerpt and say, based on the mood it appears to convey, what kind of scene they think it accompanies and where it is taking place.

Activity: 'Split moves' (adapted to music; no need to be carried out)

- *Pictureless listening (sound effects)*: in a scene without dialogue students can listen to the sounds to guess the scene. They then tell the story they think they have just heard.

Activity: 'Sounds interesting'

- *Picture or speech*: we can divide the class in two so that half of the class faces the screen, and the other half faces away. The students who can see the screen have to describe what is happening to the students who cannot. This is an effective way of mixing reception and production in spoken English. Halfway through an excerpt the students can reverse their roles and go on with the activity.

Activity: 'Back to back'

Making the most of a video

Linguistic aims: to develop listening skills, to present and practise new language and vocabulary, to develop awareness of non-linguistic communication such as facial expressions, gestures, and body language.

Preparation:

1. Select a short video clip appropriate for your children.
2. Prepare the tasks. You will need:
 - a. A first viewing task that introduces the children to the video
 - b. One or more tasks to help the children understand
 - c. Possibly a language task
 - d. A follow-up task
3. Make copies of the task sheets, or make posters with the tasks on them.

First viewing: these tasks should be very simple. Their aim is to give the children a reason for watching the video, and familiarize them with it.

- Ask the children to watch the video and tell you how many characters there are, and their names if possible.
- Cover the video, or turn it round, or turn down the picture. The children listen to the soundtrack and guess where the story takes place, who the characters are, and possibly what is happening.
- Write three or four very basic comprehension questions on the board for the children to answer after watching.
- If you use a video with a story line, ask the children to recall the previous episode and to predict what is going to happen. Then they watch and see if they were right. You can help them by giving them alternatives to choose from.

Further comprehension: these tasks should help the children understand the video in more detail, and should focus on both the language and the pictures. It is important that

the language of the task helps the children make sense of what they are hearing, and reinforces the visual aspect of the video.

- The children answer true/false questions on the story.
- Give the children simple sentences that tell the story, but out of order. The children put them in the right order.
- Write on the board five key phrases from the video and a few which are not in it. The children watch and tell you which ones they hear.
- Write summaries of the story, one of which is correct. The children choose the correct summary.
- Write out the story with some incorrect details, and read it to the children. They try to spot the mistakes, and possibly correct them.
- If the video has a soundtrack with sound effects rather than dialogue, you can cover the video before putting it on, or turn the picture down. Pause after each sound and ask the children to discuss what is happening in groups. Alternatively, you can give them a number of possibilities to choose from.

Language tasks: these should focus the children's attention on a point of language, for example a structure, a function, or even intonation patterns.

- Pause the video after an example of the language point you want to focus on, and ask the children what the person in the video said and what it means. If the language point is repeated throughout the video, after the children have heard it a few times you can stop the tape before an example and ask the children to predict what is going to be said.
- Give the children a few key phrases from the video. The children identify who says what, and then in what order.

Follow-up tasks: follow-up tasks should build on the language and/or topic of what the children have been watching. You can do them immediately after the video, or in the next lesson.

- Give the children a situation in which they could use the language from the video. For example, if the video is about restaurant language, set up a restaurant role play.
- The children draw a picture of a scene from the video, or make a book telling the story. Alternatively, you can draw the scene with empty speech bubbles, and the children write what the characters say.
- The children make puppets to represent the characters in the video and dramatize a scene.

Activity for children: (to be completed)

Kind of video: Disney movie.

Parts of the activity:

- Let them listen only to the soundtrack. They try to guess what happening, number of characters is and where is the action taking place. (First viewing task)
- Some comprehension questions. (First viewing task)
- Some true/false questions. (Further comprehension task)
- Show them a few sentences that summarize the story, but in a wrong order. They try to rearrange them. (Further comprehension task)
- Write on the board five key phrases from the video and a few which are not in it. The children watch and tell you which ones they hear. At more elementary levels, we could apply the same procedure to identify some vocabulary words

rather than complete phrases or sentences. (Further comprehension / Language task)

- We draw a scene of the movie with empty speech bubbles, and the children write what the characters say. (Follow-up task)

Alternative activity: 'Spot the items' (Elementary level)

- We give the children a list with the name of some items, making sure that everyone knows the meaning of every word.
- We play the video once.
- This time they have to spot the name of those items that visually appear in the sequence (not all of them may appear), instead of spotting those which are mentioned (because they may or may not be explicitly mentioned).
- We play the video again for them to check their lists.

Alternative activity: 'Where is it?' (Work on prepositions)

- We set a number of questions about the position of some items appearing in the excerpt (e.g. the umbrella is [on] the table, the cat walks [over] the fence, etc.) and hand them out to the children, letting them read the questions before watching the video and making sure that they know the meaning of everything.
- We play the video once.
- Meanwhile they try to complete the gaps with the different prepositions (we can also include the list of which in the handouts along with the item list).
- We play the video again.
- We correct the activity all together.