

SOME APPLICATIONS OF VIDEO MATERIAL IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

**Maite Egozkobal
Profesora de Bachillerato**

New technologies are positive in all fields and particularly for teaching purposes. This would be the case of video. It can be a useful device as long as it is not misused or abused. But video is a tool, not a method and we must use it with clear ideas about its possibilities and its limits.

The first thing to consider: are you familiar with the handling and manipulating V.C.R., video-cassettes, video cameras? If you are, consider the following things before you start using it in your classes:

- a) Always make sure the equipment (hardware and software) is in good condition.
- b) Make sure you know which part of the cassette you are going to play.
- c) Measure in advance the time the sequence, story, etc. last. It should never be too long. Long exposures are not so profitable for learners.
- d) Make sure you use it with a profitable purpose; not just «viewing» a feature film and there it is.
- e) Devise an activity to make the viewing active.

Why can video material be useful?

To start with, video materials have the same advantages as the audio cassettes recordings: you can play, replay, pause, etc.

- they show real language sounds in context.
- they let students have «more» than just the teacher's input in oral English.
- In authentic English recordings (off-air from radio/satellite broadcasts) they provide more than just language (cultural and social context).

In addition to these, using a video in the class will involve viewing scenes of real life which provide images (setting, gestures, etc.) that reinforce the language used and make it more meaningful.

When can we or should we use video materials?

- If we are using E.L.T. video materials:
 - when a new item is presented, or has been presented.
 - when we want to expose our students to social/cultural aspects of the target language (situations, social interactions, etc.).

- If we want to use non-E.L.T. materials:
 - when we want to introduce a topic for debate, at intermediate or even preintermediate levels.
 - when we want to check understanding of items previously presented and practised, to add the real version of, a specific topic (for instance a weather report).
 - in short, as any time as long as it is not overused, to present students with a full variety of real language in action (clases de desdoble).

What material should we use?

E.L.T. materials: those materials devised for teaching English as a foreign language. There is now a wide variety of choice in the market. Some of them are just as real (realistic) as some of those used in normal broadcast program. They can be in the form of stories (short plays, etc.) or short sketches of everyday face-to-face oral interaction to present situations in which a controlled amount of language occurs (person to person, etc.).

Non-E.L.T. off air recordings. Due to the facilities nowadays to record authentic video materials from satellite TV aerals, we should take some advantage on them. But before that we should have in mind that:

- not all materials/programmes are valid, exploitable or applicable in a class.
- get to know in advance what is on; there are specialized magazines available in Spain now which tell you the program for the month on each channel.

Mainly, what we can always use at a time or another are the following:

- Plays, sketches (not «Spitting Image»!), short comedies, series films.
- Documentaries (think of the possibilities for interdisciplinary activities: natural science programs, etc.).
- Cartoons or children's programs (think of «Sesame Street», for example in which the language is so controlled and measured. Available in U.S.)
- Commercials.
- Home recorded scenes: only if we have a video camera.

What amount of exposure in each session?

Always a short amount. Sometimes two or three minutes of video input is enough to fill a 50 minutes session.

What should we use the materials for?

- Presenting authentic in situations in which specific items occur.
- After having presented and practised a linguistic item in controlled language contexts, to reinforce understanding in a wider context and/or as a prior input to a more skilled production.
- For eliciting linguistic content from our students in meaningful non-linguistic sequences (silent movies, commercials, images without sound-track.
- For developing understanding skills.
- As a model for dramatization (short dialogues in E.L.T. materials) or to imitate broadcast productions (why not record a full school T.V. program?).
- For introducing or reinforcing a topic presented for debate (debates, interviews, publicity about drugs, famine, alcohol, political or international affairs).

As Margaret Allan says: «The experiences we organize for our learners vary according to the command of the language they have. This applies equally to the way we use video, which could be seen as having three distinct roles, depending on the learner level it is used at.»

With learners in the very early stages, the essence of all that we do is control. We control the amount and the complexity of language we expose them to. We limit the range of contexts to the most obvious ones. We organize activities which make very limited demands on the language control of the participants. We keep everything simple and repetitive.

Video's main role at this stage is to provide the learner with stepping stones to real world use of language by giving realistic examples of language in use of a limited range of contexts. The right kind of video material can transfer those limited bits of language to realistic situations outside the classroom and begin to bridge the gap between the two. If learner can see and recognize the language they have been studying in use in realistic situations this has two benefits:

- a) it validates the study they are doing by confirming that the language is used in the real world;
- b) it gives learners confidence in their ability to cope with the real situation.

For this we need material which provides as much visual support as possible and situations where language is highly predictable¹.

¹ Allan, M. *Teaching English with Video*. Londres, Longman. 1.985.