VIDEO MATERIAL AT FOREIGN LANGUAGE LESSONS: SOME CONSIDERATION

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Abstract: The article focuses on different trends in the use of video in a language classroom. The first part offers describes some theoretical approaches. In the next part a general methodology of using video in language teaching is briefly covered.
Key words: foreign language teaching, communicative competence, video support

We live in a world of visual storytelling. Video is everywhere. Over recent years, YouTube has become the second most popular site on the internet, beaten only by Google. Three hundred hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute, and almost five billion videos are watched every day.

Education is not an exception. Nowadays the vast majority of language teachers use video materials in their classroom. In today's increasingly visual world, it is difficult to imagine the language classroom without YouTube videos, films, student-created artwork and media, and so on. Major and Watson [9, 50] write: "The emergence of recent video-capable technologies has been described as a 'tipping point', that is a period of time in which our views of the world are likely to be significantly altered through the introduction of improved capabilities in video technology."

As a learning tool, it's hugely powerful. Video is changing the way we learn things. In terms of learning, video content is emerging as one of the best forms of education. Research shows that the use of video as a teaching tool increases the efficiency of learning [7]. We learn more quickly, more deeply and more memorably. It also improves the quality of experience, so it impacts on motivation. Video has the power to positively influence both affective and also cognitive attitudes. This seems to be true for all ages, for all kinds of subjects, for different kinds of people.

However, despite the video boom in language teaching, we need to ask whether video materials are being approached merely as an aid or support, or as a significant component of communicating in a foreign language, and as a means of fostering students' communicative competence and creativity.

In order to answer this question, we need to examine how video materials have been approached in resource books and course books.

A history of using video in English Language Teaching

Using video in a foreign language classroom has a rather long history. It's best described by Ben Goldstein in "A history of video in ELT" [6, 23-30].

The use of video in language teaching has undergone enormous changes since the media was first used in the 1980s.

When video was just starting to be used it played a largely superfluous role in the language classroom. The role of video was quite limited at that time. For many educators, video was indeed regarded as glorified audio. For example, Frances MacKnight writes: "Video can literally provide the complete picture: listening comprehension reinforced by watching comprehension… the main

linguistic benefit is considered to be the presentation of chunks of authentic language within a whole context" [8, 2]. It was a way of "doing listening comprehension tasks" but with the aid of the image to help with non-vocal communication such as body language. "Follow Me", the BBC video course is a revealing way to see how video was used in the beginning. The series commonly showed functional language contexts with heavily scripted and rather unnatural dialogue. The purpose of the video was language focus.

Emphasis was placed on vocabulary (as well as grammatical content (inside and outside the courtroom). Therefore, the language teaching approach involves an initial focus on spoken discourse in context through oral comprehension during the viewing process of the film and television series. The legal terminology is then presented in its written form. The introduction and analysis of specific lexical and grammatical elements intervene only after the viewing and oral analysis of the film.

However, with the arrival of the Communicative Approach, some teachers took a far broader view. They moved away from seeing video as merely providing a model dialogue for students, seeing it both "as a source of information" in its own right and as a "stimulus" for other activities such as debate and discussion.

The teachers' methodology handbooks about video promoted a number of tasks in which "active viewing" was seen as the key. More emphasis was placed on the interface. Teachers began to use the remote control to insert subtitles, freeze frame images and remove sound, etc. – all to give learners a more interactive role. The tasks often oblige the teacher to divide the class into groups with some students, for example, reading the script and others looking at the screen in silent mode and then coming together to piece together the scene. Or students were supposed to be engaged in information gap tasks, which demanded a greater level of engagement and interaction with the video material.

However, listening comprehension was still the most common task type. Typical video material was the series consisted of comic sketches using the same actors in different contexts, with heavily graded language and the exploitation based on skills practice – primarily listening and speaking.

Video was still very much viewed as an added extra, something you did on a Friday afternoon to alleviate the coursebook and its grammar syllabus. For this reason, most videos at that time were a form of light entertainment. Rarely would you explore anything of a more serious nature with video. This coincided with the fun element of many CLT coursebooks with the emphasis on games, songs and enjoying yourself with the language.

Current trends

Last decades, we have seen how the role of video has changed radically. This transformation has gone hand in hand with a greater emphasis on the image, what can be termed "the visual turn". Video, once only exploited for language or comprehension-based activities, is now used for many different kinds of tasks.

Firstly, the visual dimension of video is now focused on a greater extent than in the past. This does not mean just playing a video with the sound off and getting students to describe what they see but taking advantage of new video genres that include little or no accompanying text. Such films are excellent for basic level learners and can be used to do simple activities based around recalling visual images, such as memory tests.

Secondly, Video is now commonly seen as a Stimulus – as a springboard to other tasks, such as discussion or project work. Likewise, video materials are being exploited increasingly for their visual qualities with learners not having to worry about comprehension issues. This means that the same video sequence can be used for different levels. Instead of grading the input, you grade the task.

It is more possible these days to find video being exploited at the start of the lesson to activate schema and engage learners rather than as the culmination of other tasks. Popular websites such as http://film-english.com features many short films that have great visual impact and, at times, little text. The site includes ready-to-use lesson plans for teachers based on these clips.

Thirdly, in common with other media, the exploitation of video is currently moving away from working on purely lower order thinking skills – such as description – and is now encouraging learners to interpret what they view. Encouraging a more critical response is something that can be done at even basic levels. For example, after a video from YouTube is shown, students can then read and evaluate online comments to develop a more critical interpretation; they can then answer these comments and/or add their own.

So, rather than our learners following a model or merely critiquing that model, they can now design their own and thus contribute their own meanings. In the case of video, new genres and hybrids are being created as a result of these changes – remixes, mash-ups, etc. This is the future of video materials in the classroom - the learners providing the input themselves - designing, scripting, recording and transmitting it in any way they see fit. As Stephen Apkon puts it: "There is no better way to critically appraise the message of others than to speak one own's message" [1, 5].

This approach can also efficiently promote communicative competence. As we know, there are four dimensions of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic. Therefore, the language teaching activities include task-based teaching methods, for instance, in the form of mock trial exercises. In addition, when creating the syllabus, the CEFR (short for *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, Council of Europe 2011) is taken into consideration in order to identify and integrate the various tasks, skills and language competency levels [4, 101-115].

To sum up, the movement is clearly from Video Exploitation with the teacher guiding the class to Video Creation with the learner taking on a more active role.

Let's consider why video is such a useful tool in the language teaching classroom.

In her article" The Image in English Language Teaching "Antonia Clare defines the following peculiarities that help make video so effective as a language learning tool [3, 35-40]:

Access to English speaking culture

Video is hugely valuable as a source of cultural input. When we watch a video, we are immersed in a rich cultural picture. We don't just learn about the language, but we learn about how the language is used. Video gives us a cultural, socio-linguistic context for the language. Video teaches us about the world – it opens our minds to other cultures. So we're learning a lot more than just language.

Visual context

The visuality of film enables learners to understand more by interpreting the language in a full visual context. Film assists the learners' comprehension by enabling them to listen to language exchanges and see such visual supports as facial expressions and gestures simultaneously. These visual clues support the verbal message and provide a focus of attention. From this follows the next point.

Impact on cognition

One of the greatest strengths of video is its ability to communicate with viewers on an emotional as well as a cognitive level.

In education, we see that emotion and cognition are very closely interrelated. The aspects of cognition that we use when we're learning something – attention, memory, etc. are all profoundly affected by emotion. So this ability to reach learners' emotions means that video can have a positive

effect on both motivation and affective learning. These are not only important learning components on their own, but they play an important role in creating the right conditions for greater cognitive learning to take place.

Active vs. passive learning

Recent studies oppose the idea that viewing is a passive activity, supporting the theory that viewing is in fact an active process, in which learners are engaged in "an ongoing and highly interconnected process of monitoring and comprehending" and "a complex, cognitive activity that develops and matures with the child's development to promote learning" [10, 7].

So, watching video, especially in another language, and especially if you're watching with subtitles, whilst it may appear to be behaviourally passive, is a deeply cognitive activity. Also, we have a much better chance of remembering something that we watch on video than something that we read or listen to.

Authenticity

If we look at authenticity from a research point of view, we know that engagement with linguistically rich, emotive input leads to language acquisition [11]. Exposed to this type of authentic input, learners are likely to pick up on all kinds of language, which you might not even focus on, and this will help to build up their language knowledge.

Film provides students with examples of English used in 'real' situations outside the classroom, particularly interactive language – the language of real-life conversation. Film exposes students to natural expressions and the natural flow of speech. If they are not living in an English-speaking environment, perhaps only film and television can provide learners with this real-life language input.

New language vs. language reinforcement

Interestingly, when teachers use video in the classroom, it's often to focus on new language. They might use a piece of video material to highlight elements of new language, for example a particular verb tense or phrasal verbs. This is likely to be useful. However, perhaps of even more value to the learner is the reinforcement of the language they already know.

Video enables the learner to consolidate language, perhaps to focus on another aspect of its use – the intonation, pronunciation. This type of reinforcement is often missing when we focus on moving through syllabus, working on new bits of language in every lesson.

Tolerance of ambiguity

When we're watching a video, we're increasing our learners' ability to tolerate language that they don't understand, by keeping them engaged with visual messages and cues, even when they can't comprehend all the words they hear. This increased tolerance of ambiguity is an important language learning trait, which helps learners to cope with language experiences that take place in real time [2, 120].

Discussion

Video has the ability to really spark discussion in the classroom. Having engaged with a video, learners are likely to have an opinion on what they've watched, whether they agree or disagree, whether they enjoyed it or not, what they think about the characters, the setting, etc. As video is so rich in ideas and context, learners can also be encouraged to go beyond the information given, through critical thinking and analysis.

Also, learner achievement is directly connected to the level of engagement that learners feel with their peers, and video sharing is a good way to influence this. Sharing and enjoying videos as part of the learning process can be really motivating.

Ownership through creating videos

As teachers, we often find it difficult to loosen control and let the learners take the reins. One way can be to get our learners to actively create their own videos. It might be that you can use the input video as a model for the kind of task you would like your learners to do. Many online videos lend themselves well to this kind of project, for example, 'how to…' videos, recipe videos, and 50 people and 1 question videos. If we get our learners to actively create their own videos, we help them to feel a sense of ownership and control over their learning, which is so important.

Visual literacy

In 1982 UNESCO declared that the school and the family share the responsibility of preparing the young person for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds.

In the era of digital images and social networks, there are opportunities for learners to intensively create, view, download and share an unlimited number of visuals, including video material. It is important then that we teach our learners to become not just textually literate, but also visually and media literate. In this information age, we need to train our language learners in visual communication skills to comprehend and evaluate multimedia messages and enable them to access the rise of visual culture on the internet, much of which is in English.

Human connection and empathy

Video allows us to connect with people, and with their stories. We learn from other people; their skills, their experiences. This is what makes video such a transformational medium for learning. Great learning hinges on human connection. With video you can tell a story in a very powerful way; in a way that will literally transport people, in a way that will generate empathy.

Variety and flexibility

Film can bring variety and flexibility to the language classroom by extending the range of teaching techniques and resources, helping students to develop all four communicative skills. For example, a whole film or sequence can be used to practise listening and reading, and as a model for speaking and writing. Film can also act as a springboard for follow-up tasks such as discussions, debates on social issues, role plays, reconstructing a dialogue or summarising. It is also possible to bring further variety to the language learning classroom by screening different types of film: feature-length films, short sequences of films, short films, and adverts.

To sum up, educational video:
• Reinforces reading and lecture material
• Aids in the development of a common base of knowledge among students
• Enhances student comprehension and discussion
• Provides greater accommodation of diverse learning styles
• Increases student motivation and enthusiasm
• Promotes teacher effectiveness

Given all these benefits of using video in the language learning classroom, it is not surprising that many teachers are keen to use film with their students, and an increasing number of them are successfully integrating film into the language-learning syllabus. Until quite recently it was difficult to find pedagogically sound film material to help students improve their language through watching film, and teachers had to spend many hours creating their own materials. However, with the advent of the internet there is now a wealth of online resources for both language teachers and their students. With so many resources, it's sometimes difficult for teachers to see the wood for the trees.

The choice of video materials should be determined and by the following practical aspects. Firstly, the movies have already been divided into episodes so it makes the task of specifying the communicative situations easier; the movies are available in hard copies. The latter is very important as a copyright issue has to be considered while working with such kind of materials. YouTube is now widely used, and this includes a lot of content which infringes the original copyright.

To avoid it, follow the recommendations:

• Checking the name of the uploader is the copyright holder – often this will be accompanied by a blue tick

• Exploring creative commons or public domain material

• Using a site where all copyright is guaranteed, such as the British Council's 'The English Channel' Cultural Content

• Presenting new or unusual ideas in a video is a definite bonus with video content

• Websites like The English Channel can present a wealth of diverse cultural-content to complement language-learning

• All contexts vary, but as a general rule of thumb: contemporary political content, and religious content in general, is probably best avoided.

Some practical tips may be obvious to experienced teachers but useful for beginners:

• A teacher should watch the material s/he is going to use beforehand so that s/he will be able to estimate how difficult it will be for her/his students to understand it and if it is necessary to switch on subtitles or be ready to show the episode twice.

• It is also necessary to check if disks to be used are compatible with the player installed in the computer; it might be useful (and not infringing copyright) to record a disk with the episodes for a personal use in class or to extract these episodes to a flashcard.

• Depending on the students' language level and teaching objectives, either the whole movie or just several episodes.

A Suggested Activities for Video Lessons

• *Pre-Watching*. Distribute handouts with language tasks focusing on lexis or structure you have identified for the level. Students complete *before* watching again. Students watch again and check their worksheet answers

• *Screens Prediction.* Take some screenshots from the video and ask students - in groups - to create a story or situation that explains what's happening in all images. Students can then watch the video once just to check their prediction. This is most effective as a pre-watching activity, but can also be used as means of practicing writing after viewing a video.

• Play the video with no sound. Students discuss: what's happening? Why? What's the subject? What will happen? etc. This will require grading by level. Then play the video with sound. This is to check students answers from the silent task.

• Give students a basic idea of the video topic. Have them write questions they think watching the video might provide answers to. Emphasise this doesn't depend on listening, but can also be visual.

• Post-Watching. At this point, your students will have engaged meaningfully with a video, will be feeling more confident, practiced one (or more) skills, and completed some language work. From here you can:

- Role-play a scene: what happens next? Students must use some target language in their scene
- Group-writing: What happened before? Students write a prequel to the events they saw, again incorporating target language.

Students can be offered different types of exercises such as True or False (with justification); Gap Filling (listening comprehension for specific terminology); Definitions (contextual deduction); Simple to complex questions; Summary of the scene (Comprehension); Inference and deduction (Analysis of body language and expressions used during scenes); Debate and personal opinion ; Replacing a conversation in the correct order; Hypothesizing: What would you do and what could happen?; Syntax and grammar (Verbs, modals, adverbs, comparatives/superlatives, articles, etc.).

We'd like to conclude with some personal considerations.

Video-based lesson requires a lot of attention on the part of the teacher who must mediate between the video support and the students. It's well known that students like watching movies, but introducing this form of work for the first time a teacher should explain to the students how movies will be used during the course.

Films definitely highly motivate students, though it does not help them make much progress in listening comprehension. To compensate for these drawbacks, film should be used in combination with other materials.

Assigning homework may be somewhat risky because many of the students give priority to other classes and very little priority was given to English classes. For this reason, some of the homework assignments could be transformed into in-class oral or written evaluations.

The level of the materials used with the film should be just above the students' present level of English.

Maximum length of a lesson should be around 40 minutes.

The ability to get information from video materials may not be developed by a few months' training. It requires more time.

These statements are only the results of a limited study, so it would be dangerous to generalize them too much. We believe, however, our study sheds light on many neglected issues in the use of films and encourages many teachers to use films as one material for listening comprehension practice.

As student motivation is crucial in a language course, the author was initially quite hesitant to integrate film and television series into her class organization, fearing that the choice and use of film would not be of interest to the students. The final choice of a law-related film and television series was based on substantial personal research to ensure that the film and the series were appropriate for this setting. The positive feedback came in the form of attentive, motivated and intrigued students, who showed a marked interest in what they were learning and how it was being taught. They repeatedly expressed their satisfaction with the use of film and television series. the use of film in the classroom is much appreciated by students since "it is like a breath of fresh air."

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