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ABSTRACT

Three ways of using video cassettes in second language instruction include: commercially produced culture capsules, the "Speakeasy" series from the British Broadcasting Corporation, and videos locally recorded off-air. The advantages of using each of these materials types are outlined, and specific techniques for integrating them into classroom instruction are suggested. Theoretical justifications for the use of videocassettes are explained. Video provides valuable redundancy for the foreign language learner and gives the sense that foreign language communication is relevant to today's technological society. (MSE)

TV OR NOT TV?

Michael Danahy[1]

This article describes three ways of using video cassettes in L2 instruction: culture capsules commercially available, such as "Chroniques de France", the "Speakeasy" series from the BBC, and videos locally recorded off air. The advantages of using these types of materials are discussed, along with techniques for integrating them into classroom instruction and theoretical justifications for their use.

Video cassettes in the L2 classroom display many immediate and obvious advantages: for the mind they offer a procession of stimulating images in living color; for the ears a range of speaking voices at varied levels of language; and for the eyes, a fascinating glimpse of the non-verbal features of interacting in the foreign language, including the authentic and spontaneous lip movements and body language of natives (Jensen 1978). Video cassettes are quieter and easier to operate than projecting films or juggling filmstrips with cassettes and, in the long run, they will prove less expensive and more durable an investment than other forms of equipment and hardware. They give the look and feel of being an up-to-date part of today's world--a quality all too often missing in textbooks, which are often written several years before they reach the student in the classroom. But how can video be used effectively?

The President of Harvard has rightly said in his recent report to the Board of Governors that technology is only like the trucks that bring us food: they do not determine the quality of our diet and our nutritional values; they only get the stuff to us (Fiske 1985). So it is up to the users to determine "TV or not TV". In this article, I will describe three specific ways in which I have integrated video instruction into the L2 classroom, in the hopes that these experiences will help others to be successful and effective in their endeavors.

First, however, a brief summary of current data may prove helpful. A search of the literature suggests two things. First FL instruction with video cassettes is most advanced in Europe, where distances are small enough to permit recording broadcasts from one country to another (Harding-Esch 1982, Hill 1978, Odom 1976, Riley 1976). Second, in the United States, research in video-cassette instruction for L2 instructional purposes has flourished primarily in the field of English as a Second Language. Therefore, the instructor interested in learning what colleagues in the field are doing is best advised to consult the literature in this field (Allan 1984, Linke 1981, McLean 1975).

Some of this literature deals with aspects of video-cassette instruction that I will not consider in this article, namely, the studio production of video cassettes either for student instruction or for the training of language teachers, i.e. courses (like that produced by Rassias and CBS or *Ensemble* by the BBC) specifically designed to teach a particular language or language teaching methods.

CULTURAL CAPSULES ON CASSETTE

Description of Materials

The *Chroniques de France* series, to take one example, was originally produced in France and distributed in this country by the French Cultural Services. These five- to seven-minute color films with sound tracks were

1. Michael Danahy has taught both French literature and language at Wesleyan University and The Pennsylvania State University. Last year he won the Chinard Prize for pedagogical scholarship as well as the Liberal Arts Alumni Award for distinguished teaching.

available on a subscription basis for a small fee. Each release focused on one topic of broad cultural and educational appeal. With the subscription came a printed transcript of all narrative voices in the film and sometimes those of persons being interviewed or directly recorded on camera. By now, some of these topics are outdated, but they included a range from Arman the painter to the manufacture of saxophones to the Observatory at St. Michel de Provence and the athletic accomplishments of Marie Debourse.

Some of the titles are now available either as films or as video cassettes from International Film Bureau. Since my university had purchased the films outright and since the French Cultural Services were no longer making or distributing the series, we were able to obtain permission to make one copy of several films in our holdings on video cassette for classroom use only.

Use of the Cassettes

The cassettes are used primarily for the development of listening comprehension and as cultural capsules. In class, of course, video cassettes are as efficient to operate as audio cassettes. The class can be grouped around the tube with no interference from a clacking camera. Most importantly, tapes can be quickly and quietly rewound for instant replay. This advantage is particularly useful for reinforcing actual progress in student comprehension, as well as the students' confidence that some progress has been made.

However, I do not play the tapes twice in a row. In between the two runs, we spend 10 to 20 minutes on various activities based directly on the script. Thus, the individual instructor is free to use the printed and visual material as the basis of a cognitive approach to grammar, or a series of TPR activities, or inductive, empirical vocabulary development. I very often use the script to devise a series of content questions geared to the ACTFL oral proficiency level of the students. Borrowing from the ALM repertory, I signal four or five different students to pose the same question in rapid fire succession to the same student. The person designated thus has time to assimilate the question and formulate an answer.

The questions can be simple yes/no or more complex types, but in all cases the class is being physically conditioned to benefit from the second showing of the tape. The mouths and ears of the audience are getting used to what they will be hearing and seeing on television and the psychological impact of recognition the second time around is usually forceful and favorable.

I have also devised written exercises based literally on the script. These are of four types:

10 yes/no questions

10 true/false questions

10 information getting questions

a cloze procedure

I, therefore, have the luxury, depending on my mood and the kinds of students I have, of choosing one or another of these exercises to hand out. It is to be completed during the second showing of the cassette. With this extra printed support in front of them, students can practice reception and comprehension skills with more precision. The questions, simple and short, are written to reward the effective listener or reader, rather than bedevil the most astute. After the second showing, moreover, these questionnaires can serve to focus a general discussion, or for further group correction, analysis, and processing, or even for more oral practice.

Another exercise type is the scrambled paragraph. Here two possibilities exist. The student receives either a set of sentences which paraphrase the content and summarize the gist of the video or, alternatively, a sequence of sentences directly transcribed from the sound track. But in either case, the sentences have been mixed up, or rearranged, and the student must reconstruct their appropriate chronological or logical order, by listening and/or reading for the gist, as well as attending to connectives. I have not described these activities in greater detail, because I am sure that most readers are already familiar with them, and because, in any event, most widely known L2 pedagogy and methods texts describe them in careful detail.

If these are the ways, in rough outlines, of using the video cassettes and script in class, out of class the instructor must make some preliminary decisions. He or she must take stock of the number of cassettes to be integrated into a course, the frequency and rhythm of their use, and his or her own philosophy, that is, the purpose for using them and the objectives that can be realistically attained in using them. Consciously or unconsciously, we all decide how much dependence on the printed script we wish to tolerate or encourage.

I am fortunate enough to have one cassette available per week. What I do, therefore, is set up a schedule whereby the students are progressively weaned from using the script to make sense of what they are hearing and seeing.

-Tapes 1 and 2: distribute the script a day ahead of the video presentation, so that the class may read it over at home and prepare for what they will hear and see.

-Tapes 3 and 4: distribute the script on the same day in class, just ahead of the presentation. This gives people practice in reading for comprehension within a controlled amount of time. I ask them, in either approach, not to refer to the printed word during the first showing, but to absorb what they can through their ears and eyes.

-Tapes 5 and 6: distribute the script after the first showing in class, but before doing any exercises or pattern drills. Students may rely on the printed test to help themselves through some fast paced oral/aural exercises.

-Tapes 7 and 8: hand the script out only after the oral/aural activities. People are being trained to rely on their ears to decipher signals.

-Tapes 9 and 10: now distribute the script after the second showing, as a way of meeting the needs of those who may feel that they have been getting nothing out of the "broadcasts".

After this point, I refrain from distributing the script at all. Thus the students are gently nudged into integrating sight and sound, whether from the classroom activities or the TV screen. Ultimately, I eliminate a second showing altogether, in which case, it is helpful at first either to have some oral preparation activities or pass out one of the four types of questionnaire or exercises in order to focus the attention of the listener-learners. After the single showings, I try to lead a general loosely-structured discussion of the video, its contents (at whatever level is appropriate for asking questions of this sort), or student reactions.

Advantages

The chief pedagogical, as opposed to technical, advantage of using video cassettes must inevitably lie in student responses to them. Video cassettes expose students in an enjoyable manner to language in a context that is as natural and as "live" as we currently know how to make it.

The second advantage of relying on video-cassette instruction applies more to the instructor. For it emerges as the method of choice for those who prefer an eclectic approach to choosing one of several ironclad methods. The instructor retains far greater control than over prepackaged text and tape programs. Because the videos were not originally targeted for a mass market as a lower level vocabulary and grammar instructional tool, they are adaptable to most teaching methods. That is, they may serve either as the basis of instruction or as an integrated supplement.

A third and final great advantage of video-cassette material is its controllable length. The *Chroniques de France* meet the criterion established by the research and experiments of Jensen and Vithner (1983:132) who state that the optimal duration for video material per lesson has proved to be three to seven minutes. Because the tapes in question are relatively *short*, short enough, that is, to be replayed during one class period, they enable students to perceive a difference between their first and second hearing. Through this process, they build that sense of confidence, progress, and achievement without which there is no motivation. Even those who think it boring to go over the same material twice in a row are usually willing to forego that objection if the visual material is rich and well done. The pleasure of instant replay is a part of today's lifestyle.

Theoretical Justification

Video cassettes expose students to what Krashen (1984; 1981:10-38) calls an "acquisition rich environment". For the scripts were written to convey messages of intellectual and cultural significance to adults. That is, the language was not tailored by overly protective editors artificially to provide redundant examples of selected lexical or syntactical patterns. They provide, instead, all the elements of the "I+1" situation that Krashen defines as ideal for genuine language acquisition. By this shorthand formula, he simply means that the student is receiving contextualized chunks of language input at a level somewhat above his or her current stage of conscious learning.

Generalization

My videos are in French. Nor are they the only ones available commercially. French Video (900 Broadway, Suite 600, New York, NY 10003) currently markets a particularly artistic and amusing collection of French TV ads. Because they come with a script, one may adapt these "shorts" in much the same ways that I have described above, either for language training purposes or for cross-cultural comparisons and analysis. The commercials are grouped around products and industries, which makes it easy for the instructor to divide them into manageable units and for the students to use them as models for making their own ads. In fact, for those who believe that Roland Barthes' analysis of advertising slogans and symbols in *Mythologies* offers a unique way to understand discourse, then TV ads become the privileged text for studying how a given culture uses language, as well as a way in to the linguistic features that carry meaning in that culture.

SPEAKEASY

Description of Materials

Speakeasy is a video cassette produced by the BBC and so named because the series of pantomimes it offers are designed to make it easy for the viewer to speak in the absence of actors who speak. The 14 skits on one tape meet the BBC's highest professional standards of artistic and technical excellence. Delightful piano music accompanies the superb acting and the dumb show usually takes on the flavor of an "old time movie". The entire package, which retails for $400 from Audio Forum, is accompanied by a complete, but compact, instructor's guide of 30 pages, containing detailed plot summaries, catalogues of the language functions brought into play, and excellent suggestions for using *Speakeasy* in a variety of ways and with a variety of instructional contexts and levels. Paradoxically, because it contains no language at all, it is well suited for the study of any language. Because mime is

the universal language, it is truly the all-purpose cassette. More important than simply making it easier for the viewer to speak in the presence of actors who do not speak is what the tape makes it easy to speak about. For the 14 situations that constitute the dumb shows are usually what proponents of the oral proficiency movement would call survival situations, many of them with a complication. These include situations like:

-introducing oneself to a member of the opposite sex

-ordering a meal in a restaurant

-learning to play tennis by asking and answering questions

-getting a taxi ride and getting lost

-buying a pair of shoes and finding out that they do not fit

-straightening out airline reservations.

Use of *Speakeasy*

The skits lend themselves to widely differing uses in a range of pedagogical settings and persuasions. They can form the basis for "homemade" pattern drills or spontaneous role plays either in small groups or in front of the entire class; on the other hand, these may be rehearsed for later re-enactment, or they can form the topic of written exercises or composition; and because they depict connected stories easily assimilated, they can form the substance for narrating or describing in past, present, or future time. As the basis of a chain story by everyone in class, the narrative may be written or oral, and proceed in chronological order or be related in reverse chronological order. In the latter case, each participant gets to use the introductory formula, "Yes, but before that happened, this happened..." Here the narrative chain resembles a backwards build up sentence in which the last element is uttered first, and the new material is added on to the most familiar part. Such a procedure makes it easier to recall the whole syntactical grouping. Seldom can a student go wrong and have nothing to say, for even the most inattentive will usually recall or find a detail to add in following this procedure.

Advantages

A *Speakeasy* broadcast efficiently transmits to the student sufficient material for language practice in context and for verbalizing all the visual messages received. The instructor thus secures a guaranteed minimum of raw material, which is not always the case with homework. When students do not do outside reading assignments, there is nothing to speak about. Like nature, *Speakeasy* abhors this vacuum and fills it. One brief broadcast supplies ample matter for guided language practice, as well as meaningful interchanges and communication, and the speaking practice is not linked to the reading habit, practice, or ability.

Theoretical Justification

The skits involve the viewers in what J. L. Austin (1975:121-132) has defined as performative or illocutionary speech acts. In this use of language, the speaker actually accomplishes a certain task, such as ordering, leavetaking, inviting, apologizing, reprimanding, expressing gratitude, and the like, by the speech act itself. To say something is to do something, because the language is meant to take effect or secure uptake. Because an illocutionary act invites response or a sequel, it goes to the heart of communicative competence; it involves the speaker in interpersonal exchange, rather than third person referential use of language. Television without words therefore helps the viewer to use words immediately to get the job done. The speech acts stressed by *Speakeasy* are those

suggested by the Council of Europe's definition of a threshold level of language and the functions that adults most frequently need to be able to carry out in a second language. Its philosophical underpinnings do not mean, however, that *Speakeasy* speaks only to true believers in the functional notional syllabus. Far from it. Conceptually, *Speakeasy* is consistent as well with CLL, Counselor Language Learning, associated with the name of Father Charles Curran (Stevick 1980:100-130). The instructor serves as a facilitator or resource person for the students trying to reenact the mini dramas. The teacher assigns the active roles to students, who work in pairs, to perfect the speaking parts. But the teacher as such remains offstage, outside the charmed circle as it were, to act only as a talking dictionary.

OF SOAPS AND OTHER OFF-AIR FOLLIES

The uses of television described above both require a moderate capital outlay of $50-$400. For instructors whose budget would embarrass Arthur Frommer, one option remains. And it combines several of the advantages and theoretical considerations of both approaches already discussed. Locally televised material can be incorporated into classroom activities. Create your own *Speakeasy* simply by televising without sound. If a VCR is available, you need only tape what you want at home ahead of the class and play it back with the sound turned off. In the absence of a home video machine, you may simply select a show being broadcast during the class and turn off the sound.

Use of Inaudible TV

With the sound of an actual television show or recording turned off, one can essentially carry out all the *Speakeasy* activities outlined above. In this case, however, the choice of what to air is problematic. Many instructors find that the afternoon soaps are most effective. Are the reasons obvious? If these soaps are not actually a way of life among young (and old) people, they are an institution. Millions know the characters, themes, and plots. Seventh graders and doctoral candidates alike, in English or engineering, talk volubly about them, predict their twists and turns, guess the outcomes, assess character and motivation, summarize the main events, describe the settings, props, and clothing, construct hypothetical situations, and argue about intention. In class, therefore, the characters are well enough known, the situations basic enough, the facial expressions strong enough, and the camera technique obvious enough to sustain various communication activities: questions and answers, discussions, role playing, small group writing projects. Perhaps the soaps are not on at the right time or you, like nature, abhor the vacuum that they represent. In this event think about taping commercials, game shows, or interviews for use in this manner. *The Price is Right*, with contestants from the class doing the bidding, while the sound is off, is ideal for practicing numbers and the names of objects or for shouting out orders. Likewise, the task of preparing a 30-second sales pitch usually energizes most students. Making up ads to deliver in the foreign language while the "real" ad plays on the screen often leads to great creativity from the "announcers" and delights the class, who can enjoy the foreign language as a spoof of Madison Avenue or the expression of the seller's personality. We all have a bit of the ham or huckster in us, especially in speaking a non-native language, and this TV activity gives an explicit outlet to it in the L2 acquisition process. Similarly, news clips or interviews featuring known personalities, like François Mitterrand, Catherine de Neuve, or Chancellor Kohl on the silent screen, can serve as a backdrop with students doing the audio part live. With the proper preparation, students manage these adult projections with gusto.

CONCLUSION

We can best answer Hamlet's question, "TV or not TV?" with a word from one of his great admirers, Sigmund Freud: "Overdetermination". Television absorbs at once the eyes and ears of the language learner, concentrating the mental energy on the screen. From the colors, shapes, movements, and camera angles, as well as from voice and music, the L2 learner receives redundant messages and clues to decoding the foreign language. Students are not receiving one message in one form only, the privileged voice of the teacher. Rather, as in a dream, each of the acoustical and visual images is overdetermined, carrying overlapping sensory stimuli, bearing several symbolic meanings at once. Each image therefore accomplishes several tasks at once. For unconsciously and very

efficiently, the student takes in more than one meaning or clue to meaning with each image. This psychological process helps make television, with or without words, an effective tool in L2 acquisition. While the medium is not the message here, it surely gives the immediate and concrete sense that foreign language communication belongs with today's technological living.

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