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USING VIDEO IN THE CLASSROOM

The article is intended to introduce the idea of using video as an effective aid in language teaching to the students of our Teachers' Training College and an attempt is made to clarify and illustrate the principles of this new field in ELT.

Without claiming to be all-inclusive, this paper tries to offer an outline of how to make use of vieo in the course of college English studies and thus enable trainee teachers at our college to adapt the new medium so that they should be able to adapt what they see to suit their circumstances and needs of their own students later in their teaching careers.

As more and more schools in Hungary possess videos and the necessary software is also available, it is important that trainee teachers become competent with the machinery, preparation and special techniques the medium requires. I think video exploitation techniques should be introduced as part of the methodology classes. It is not only mere description and theory but demonstration and practice that would make video-based lessons more productive. In other words, relevant video materials and the availability of the hardware are essential in getting students used to video. The introduction of video in any institution of education depends on the following three factors[1]:
the availability of

    (i)   materials

    (ii)   necessary equipment

    (iii)   suitable planning carried out by well prepared and
                 purposeful teachers

It is generally understood that video requires a particular set of hardware, which consists of a VCR, a monitor or TV, and a camera might additionally belong to it.

The materials are represented by three main sources, which are the following:

(i)   ELT specific

(ii)   of one's own

(iii)   off-air recordings

ELT specific materials are designed with the purpose to become an integrated part of language teaching and meet the requirements of language classes. They concentrate attention on items within carefully selected language areas and, as it is done in the case of other teaching materials, they are based on sophisticated methodological concepts. Initially these language programmes have been launched as TV programmes, broadcast parts of a series, and that presented teachers and students with the obvious problems of a relatively short viewing time and, above all, broadcast times differing from those of classes. This problem has successfully been solved at once with the appearance of audiovisual tapes.[2]

ELT video materials often come out as multi-media courses, consisting of videotapes, textbooks or activity books, teacher's guide and in some cases audio casettes.[3]

It is desirable that teachers become familiar with this kind of material design and be able to use other materials, such as films, plays, documentaries or even cartoons. There are specially adopted sample versions of literary masterpieces or the classics of storytellers that are designed to make language come alive in a pleasant way in the classroom. Although these materials are likely to capture the attention and stimulate the interest of learners, still their application should be carefully planned with a variety of different viewing tasks and follow up activities. These techniques are going to be discussed later.

Although copying or off-air recording seems to provide teachers with an unlimited flow of material, one has to select and make plans so as to promote active viewing; and devise suitable practice. For off-air recording one thing should be kept in mind and that is unauthorized copying, which is obviously illegal.

Some teachers might want to produce their own materials which would require certain technical skills. Certainly it could be a thrilling

experience but only production of supplementary mater... is advisable. Another important aspect of utilizing video faciliti-s in the classroom is observing the process of teaching, the work both of teachers and students. However, teachers are not very likely to be encountered with this experience, at least not initially when dealing with video. I think presenting some basic information on how the video casette player itself can successfully be brought into the classroom will be of more use for trainee teachers. This paper is just an outline of ideas on this increasingly important resource, therefore calls attention only to major areas, like that of exploiting the visual element.

It is to be emphasized that the choice of materials has to meet the following three assumptions and expectations about video:[4]

(i)   it will be worth looking at

(ii)   it will provide elements not found in other media

(iii)   learners will benefit from it

The first two criteria is, almost by definition, inherent in the audiovisual in the sense that it is a combination of sound and vision, hence conveys the atmosphere of the target language culture; language in fact comes alive realistically by the characters of the programme. In. J. Lonergan's description:

"The outstanding feature of video films is their ability to present complete communicative situations. The combination of sound and vision is dynamic, immediate, and accessible. This means that communication can be percieved easily by viewers -- and language learners "[5]

I believe the most beneficient way of getting students acquainted with the advantages and disadvantages of video is by means of using it in college conversation classes as well. In this ideal case video could be exploited twofold; primarily students' fluency would be improved by using some advanced level material with them, and secondly, parallel with language practice in almost native situations ways of using video would be presented to them. Thus indirectly and still in a passive way they become familiar with the medium.

After having had at least a few classes using video students would be interviewed on their opinion and asked to discuss pros and contras. In order not to get lost in details the appropriate terminology is to be

introduced. The accompanying diagram is designed to provide a guide to enable students to focus on key expressions in connection with video. Using an overhead projector the relevant parts could be revealed as the discussion advances.

Though most authors claim that there are no actual rules to be followed by teachers, there still exists a unanimous agreement on two areas in connection with video exploitation, which are:

(1) avoiding students' passivity

(2) exploiting the non-verbal elements -- as well as the verbal Inevitably watching video programmes immediately connects with an experience everyone has been exposed to, and that is watching TV.

Students should realize that watching video does not equal with sitting back passively during class. Teachers, on the other hand, must know the material well and be competent both with choice of segments and techniques of exploitation, because their role "... is central ... the teacher has to relate the materials to the language learner's needs."[6] The fact that, though attractive and motivating, video is no more than an extra aid for language teaching should never be overlooked.

Secondly, all the experts warn teachers not to focus exclusively on the verbal; in other words, use video differently from audio.

There is no doubt about the unique wealth of information of sound and vision. This has two aspects to it, (1) it presents language in realistic situations and (2) it is set in a cultural context. According to Margaret Allan, "... video is a literal medium demanding believable characters in believable situations."[7] Situation or action appears in its entirety, with all the extra- and paralinguistic aspects of communication. Language itself with its specific features is in the focus; language carries the cognitive load but visual clues are to be considered as potential clues to culture-bound elements of the message. Furthermore, the visual supplies teachers with extra discussion topics or can be exploited for improving writing skills as well.

A most useful summary of the exploitation of the visual is given by M. Allan, in which she not only enumerates systematically the non-verbal elements of language but also gives some advice on how to assess them. Her conclusion is that if the language to be studied is not officially

spoken in the country it is absolutely necessary to pay attention to the visual.

For a better understanding of it teachers should get acquainted with Ray Birdwhistell's[8] division of non-verbal signs.

The visual signals comprise of gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, proximity, appearence and setting in Allan's classification. From her analysis of these categories it is clear that all of them convey information about different cultural and social attitudes, either with or without being part of the interaction. Thus appearence and setting are not part of it, being the so-called extralinguistic elements of communication. On the other hand, social norms and disposition varying from culture to culture (proximity), "body language" and behaviour that indicates inclinations (posture), conscious or unaware facial expressions or gestures usually appear as part of the interaction. In Birdwhistell's classification there are

(i) idiosyncratic signals, which are characteristic of the individual, so these are the most unlikely to be taught in a language class;

(ii) learned gestures, which are culture-specific and thus cultural differences could be pointed out;

(iii) continuous movement, which in fact is an indication of intentions in interactions and could be of importance for ESP

At this point students could be asked to collect examples of the various visually important elements. At the same time, as becoming primary school teachers, they should emphatically be reminded that the visual clues mean virtually new information for young learners, hence interest and motivation can be generated among pupils.

In the case of video the question of "how" to use it successfully emerges for all teachers, especially when first confronted with it. One should not be surprized by the answer supplied by video specialists pointing out that there are basic techniques to be mastered by teachers and that these offer an almost endless variety of possibilities with the different materials. Each of the experts on video identifies a particular set of exploitation techniques, notably nine or ten basic methods are

enumerated. These strategies can be employed with virtually any video, in any class. In outline, they are:

(1) viewing straight through -- with short sections

(2) viewing in sections -- with longer sections or arranging material for an information gap exercise

(3) silent viewing ("sound off") -- showing a scene with the sound turned off and asking for interpretation

(4) starting with sound only -- with cartoons or other established series

(5) prediction -- stopping the video or freezing a frame and considering what will happen next

(6) freeze frame -- stopping the video by pushing the "pause" button; asking all kinds of questions on the frame, focussing both on the verbal and the visual element

(7) description -- asking students to describe what they have been watching (both sound and vision)

(8) reading their minds -- speculating on the speakers' thoughts (after viewing conversations)

(9) understanding their feelings -- exploring the emotions of the characters

(10) topics (themes) -- interpeting a scene, with re-enacting

(11) role play -- presenting a non-exact "repetition" of a scene within the framework of acquired language ("acting it out")

(12) reviewing -- watching the whole section through for closing and expressing opinions about it in speech or writing

As application of these methods varies with the material presented, only a few practical examples can be discussed here.

In fact, the different techniques are combined with different activities. Activities when using video in the classroom divide into the following categories:

    (i)   previewing
    (ii)   viewing
    (iii)   follow-up

Before making use of any materials in the classroom teachers must make sure that either the tapescript is available for them or they are able to produce one on their own. Silent viewing is advisable as well, to

analyse the programme from the point of view of possible interpretations that might come up in class or details that might need further clarification. J. Lonergan's instruction is well worth taking into consideration:

"When introducing video ... for the first time, any tasks associated with viewing should be deliberately simple."

Teachers should also show confidence in handling the machine, ie. be able to use appropriately the various facilities (the "pause", "stop", "start", etc. buttons); and preferably be prepared to carry out all the necessary adjustments during class with noting down counter positions in advance.

In any kind of classes using video the actual viewing is preceeded by tuning in activites. In the case of viewing a section straight through the vocabulary and topic are to be introduced first, and a set of questions are given to the learners. These questions concentrate on global understanding; later, for the second viewing they focus on details. Note that it is not a good idea to ask students to make notes or complete a worksheet while they view as they will miss some of the information (especially in lower levels). A first viewing straight through can be checked with simple true or false questions. All active viewing guides should primarily support comprehension, but can be developed into practice or reinforcing exercises.

Longer units are to be divided up into shorter segments, and presented in a sequence interrupted by the same simple activities as above. On the other hand, the order of the segments can be rearranged and the class divided into groups watch the sections separately with the aim of trying to reconstruct the whole by an information gap exercise. This technique is suitable for documentary materials and, as it requires a certain amount of language for exchanging information, can be applied in accordance with the level of the learners.

Silent viewing offers lots to do. Previewing questions for dialogues could be:

Who are the people you see?

Why are they there?

What are they doing?

and for documentaries:

Where is the palce?

What objects are shown?

Why is it interesting?

Language could also be focussed on: students try to predict what people are saying. When silent viewing, students might do such exercises as to match sentences with speakers (which obviously they did not hear).

Freezing a frame is in some ways similar to silent viewing; it works well during the second or third watching. As it has been pointed out earlier, freeze frame is a treasury of information. The clothes, age, behaviour, etc. of characters can all be involved in questions or filling in tables; and this technique makes it possible to elaborate on culture-specific features that appear (anything from the emerald of the lawn to a sticky Brighton rock).
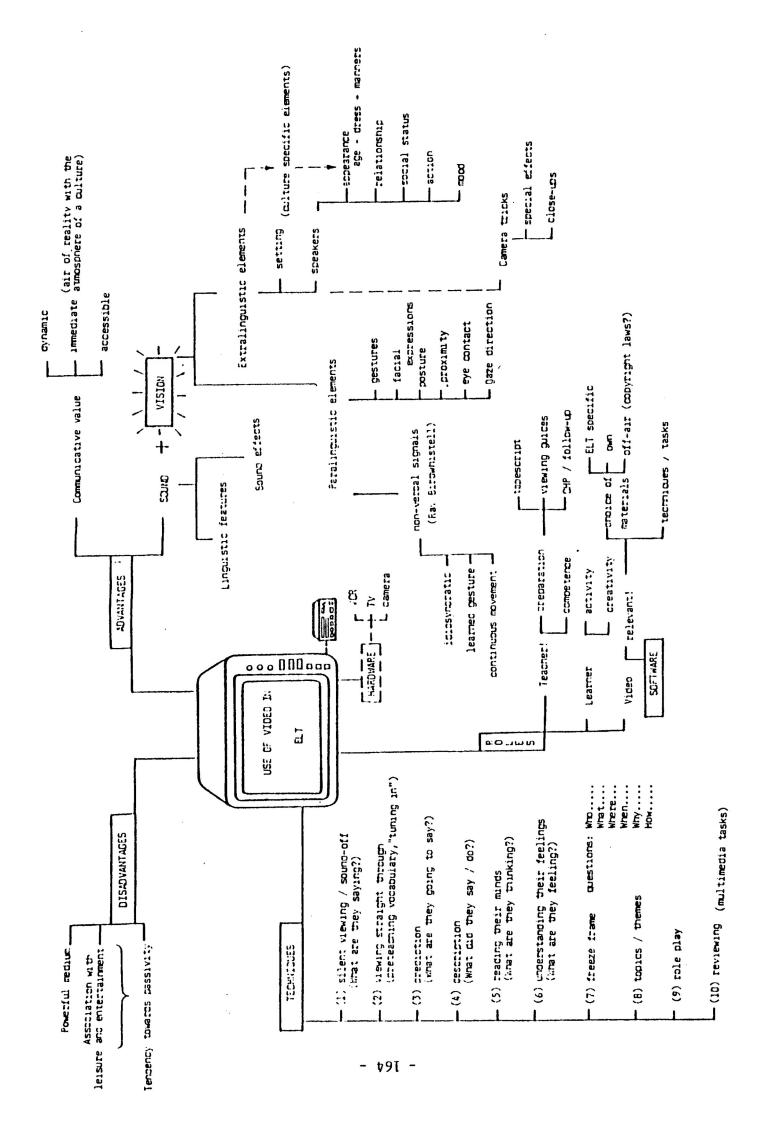
Speech might become easier for a great number of students as facial expressions help them to get at the correct pronunciation, placement of stress and appropriate intonation. Verb tenses can also be practised efficiently either by students commenting the section (with the sound off, audio-dubbing) or by mere description of what they have seen.

All the conventional methods can conveniently be applied with video (completion exercises, filling in sentences or tables, even reading is possible with presenting students the tapescript or a concise version of it). Written exercises are used as follow-up.

Video ulitmately should be a stimulus for language production. From the stage of reception this process with some simplification could be described as follows: reception ── comprehension ── practice reproduction/reinforcement ── production.

I think for trainee teachers it would be rewarding to focus on beginner/elementary and intermadiate levels. The amount and the complexity of language presented to primary school learners must carefully be controlled. There are ELT materials (eg. A Weekend Away in Streamline English, OUP) that are designed to satisfy the needs of a

complete course. As it has already been started in grammar schools, some
primary schools might introduce video experimentally. If the hardware is
available, it only requires some ingenuity and a bit of planning from
teachers. Video can provide unique kinds of teaching. It can extend
learners' access to English and its uses by presenting a greater variety
of speakers in a wider range of contexts that can be convincingly treated
in a textbook or classroom. It can show language at work within whole
systems of interaction, including non-verbal communication, and it can
help supply the social and cultural background necessary for the language
to be understood fully. It can also make the meaning of difficult
language immediately clear; all these advantages will make learners want
to watch and learn. Teachers are always encouraged to select and adapt
materials to fit in with their own timetables, syllabuses and groups.

USE OF VIDEO IN ELT

ADVANTAGES

Communicative value

VISION + SOUND

VISION
- dynamic
- immediate (air of reality with the atmosphere of a culture)
- accessible

Extralinguistic elements
- setting (culture specific elements)
- speakers
  - appearance
    - age - dress - manners
  - relationship
  - social status
  - action
  - mood

Camera tricks
- special effects
- close-ups

Paralinguistic elements
- gestures
- facial expressions
- posture
- proximity
- eye contact
- gaze direction

SOUND
- Linguistic features
- Sound effects

non-verbal signals (Ra. Eisenhinstell)
- idiosyncratic
- learned gesture
- continuous movement

HARDWARE
- VCR
- TV
- camera

SOFTWARE
Teacher:
- preparation
- competence

Learner
- activity
- creativity

Video relevant!
- transcript
- viewing guides
- CYP / follow-up

choice of materials
- ELT specific
- own
- off-air (copyright laws?)

techniques / tasks

DISADVANTAGES
- Powerful medium
- Association with leisure and entertainment
- Tendency towards passivity

TECHNIQUES
(1) silent viewing / sound-off (What are they saying?)
(2) viewing straight through (presenting vocabulary, "tuning in")
(3) prediction (What are they going to say?)
(4) description (What did they say / do?)
(5) reading their minds (What are they thinking?)
(6) understanding their feelings (What are they feeling?)
(7) freeze frame questions: Who....
   What....
   Where....
   When....
   Why....
   How....
(8) topics / themes
(9) role play
(10) reviewing (multimedia tasks)

Notes and references

1. cf. Karen Price, "The use of technology: varying the medium in language teaching," in Interactive Language Teaching (NY:CUP, 1987),

2. Jack Lonergan, Video Applications in English Language Teaching (NY:Pergamon Press, 1983)

3. for further information see Idegennyelvek Tanítása, 1987/6

4. on the basis of Robert Maidment's "Video in ELT", a lecture delivered by the author in Budapest, 22 Jan. 1988. He has designed videos for OUP and shared his ideas with and called attention to important aspects of Hungarian teachers.

5. J. Lonergan, op. cit.

6. Ibid.

7. Margaret Allan, "Making full use of your video," Teaching English with Video (Essex, England: Longman, 1985)

8. cf. M. Allan op. cit. Ray Birdwhistell is an American anthropologist, his book Kinesis vs Context (London: CUP, 1970) contains the ideas brought into methodology.