

AUDIO USE OF VIDEO

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Pictures, pictures, pictures ... We live in a time of pictures and it is very natural that a teacher of EFL working with video for the first time should be keen to exploit the visual strands of the video text. There are lots of interesting, useful ways of doing this. Let me give you an example: choose a three minute slice of video and ask the students to notice each time there is a change of camera angle or scene, in other words each time there is a cut. If you choose a newscast there will be a moderate number of cuts, while if you choose a sequence with advertisements there will be cuts as frequently as one per 2 seconds. After the first viewing ask the students to tell you how many cuts they noticed. Often they disagree. Play the sequence again so they can recount. If you want the audio text to come as a surprise, after the count-the-cuts viewing, then play the sequences with sound off. On the other hand you may want the students to do peripheral listening comprehension while counting the cuts. Both approaches make good, but different sense.

'Count the cuts' is an excellent video literacy exercise and there are many more like it that focus the students' attention on the visual strand of the video message. But as language teachers we should not let ourselves be mesmerised by the impact of the pictures. Our professional need is to help the students to work auditorily too. Through the rest of this article I want to offer you practical ways of focusing attention on the ear, with the eye as the secondary sensory channel.

Counting the Voices

Choose a sequence of 3-4 minutes with between 4 and 9 voices featured. Play the sequence with sound only and ask students to close their eyes. Ask them to count the voices. If there is disagreement replay the sequence. If the sequence is taken from a soap opera or drama you can ask the students to listen for a third time and to jot down the sequence in which the voices intervene e.g.:

old man - child - woman 1, child, woman 2 etc ...

While conscious focus in this activity has been on counting, a lot of making sense has also been going on. Sometimes the best listening comprehension is done by the rest of the brain while the most conscious part is doing something relatively mechanical, as in this exercise.

Which Voices Do You Like and Why?

Choose a sequence with not more than 4-6 voices, tell the students to shut their eyes and decide which voices they like and which ones they dislike. Also ask them to listen for voices that remind them of people they know. Play the sequence once with sound only. People's choices can be stimulatingly different.

What Sort of Body Did This Voice Come From?

Again choose a sequence with a limited number of voices (3-4 mins). Ask the students to listen through with eyes shut (sound only). Play the sequence a second time and this time ask them to concentrate on one voice and decide what kind of body belongs to the voice. Ask them to focus on size, looks, age, dress, colouring etc ... After the second listening pair the students who worked on a given voice, so they exchange impressions. Students will now be eager to check out their guesses and see the bodies. This time, would you play the sequence with pictures only or with sound and pictures, or with low sound and pictures? Each of the three ways has its own advantages. (Don't you think it is marvellous that there should be so many options in methodology?)

Many students find it very hard to stick to describing the physical appearance of the body belonging to the voice; they want to describe the moral qualities of the person. This is an easier, alternative task you can set them.

Echoing

Choose a sequence with two people in roughly balanced dialogue. Play it through once to the group with sound and picture. On the second playing, with picture only, ask the students to choose one of the two speakers and to mimic his/her body posture and gesture. This may involve students in standing up if the speaker on the screen is standing. Explain to the students that, at first, they may feel goofy and self-conscious. Ask them to experience the embarrassment and then to forget about it. The reason for mirroring the people on screen is to feel closer to them and prepare to use them as sound models.

Now explain to the students that you will play the sound only and that this time they are to 'echo' what the speaker of their choice says. Echoing means repeating as close behind the speaker as humanly possible e.g.:

Speaker: I wonder what you think about ...

Echoer: I wonder what you think about ...

In some cases a good echoer will predict and precede the speaker's speech. Give the students a bit of practice with you echoing them and then them echoing you before you ask them to work with the sequence.

After this first experience of echoing allow time for student feedback. The work is odd, new and for some disturbing, as they may come very close to the speaker if they manage to echo well.

Finally, play the sequence again with sound and picture and this time ask them to mirror their chosen speaker's body posture and to echo the voice.

Echoing is one of the most natural and powerful of the tools in the language learner's kit, though it seems to suit some learners a lot better than others. It is the kind of exercise that is ideally done on one's own, privately, in front of a video screen. I have come across people who have used this technique as their main one for picking up a language from zero. First they have echoed and then gradually begun to pick out semantic threads. Surrender, acceptance and ingestion prior to understanding, grasping and knowing. It's not everybody's way but one powerful way of learning.

Working on TV News

Play the group 5-10 minutes of a newscast with picture and sound. After the play-through ask them to work with a partner and make notes of all the information they managed to gather on first hearing. Encourage them to make individual notes and to spread these over their page/s leaving gaps so that they can add more detailed information later.

Now play the sequence with sound only. This time they take notes while listening (the picture is no longer getting in the way of this consecutive note-taking). Give time for the pairs to compare notes; often one student has understood parts that the other has got only a fuzzy grip on.

Pair the pairs so that the students have more time for peer-teaching.

Finally, play the whole sequence through for them to just sit back and listen to unanalytically. You may want to round off the work by picking up on half a dozen bits of hard language or by letting them ask you things they still feel they haven't got clear.

Sound Snippets From a Feature Film/Documentary

Have you noticed how disjointed the text can be when a person tries to tell you the story of a film or the steps of a documentary? In the exercise that follows students use snippets from the sound track of something they have seen to help them give a coherent account of it.

Ask a couple of students to view a film or video and to each have an audio-recorder with them as they view. Every two to four minutes they record a snatch of the sound track, a 10-20 second snatch, not more. If the programme lasts an hour they should end up with 10-20 sound extracts on their audio machines.

Using these blobs of sound as sign-posts, as reference points, ask them to explain the gist of the programme to their classmates. This will sometimes entail them wanting to describe the pictures that corresponded with a given bit of sound-track.

Further Reading and Writing

If these ideas on exploiting the audio side of video sequences annoy you, tempt you, arouse your interest or satisfy you then you may want to read more about the area. There are a couple of books I'd recommend you have a look at: **Video in Action**, by Stempleski and Tomalin, Prentice Hall, 1990. This text is packed with clear practical ideas for video exploitation drawn from both sides of the Atlantic. It deals mostly with how to use pre-packaged video in your classes.

The second book I'd recommend is **Video**, by Cooper, Lavery and me, OUP, 1991. This book's major strength lies in helping students to work usefully with the video camera, learning to create their own sounds and picture sequences.

In many ways the two books complement each other and I suggest you have a look at both. Together they will no doubt provoke better books later in the 90's that will usefully consign them to the past! Maybe you, gentle reader, will write one these books. By standing on another's shoulders you can see a lot farther!