Part 1: Video exploitation

Introduction

1 Activity types

A brief history

It is interesting to see that video-based activities have, over the last decades, moved from very controlled, language-based tasks to comprehension-based ones and then to exploring a much freer role. *Language focus* tasks were adopted by early video English courses such as the BBC's *Follow Me* (from 1979). However, they are still used today on a whole host of online English language courses. For example, some of Vicki Hollett's *Simple English Videos* (www.simpleenglishvideos.com) focus on language items that are particularly problematic for language learners. The items are embedded in short dialogues that are used to exemplify the difference between them (for example, between *interesting* and *interested* or *sympathetic* and *nice*).

Early video courses such as *Follow Me* included these short sequences or exchanges to highlight specific language items. However, within the same episode, they would also offer longer sequences in the form of comedy sketches. This was something taken up by a number of ELT ready-made video products such as *Grapevine* (Oxford University Press, early 1990s) which adopted elements of roles 1 and 2 (see Introduction, pp. 3–4 for a closer analysis of the key roles of video in the classroom) within a situation comedy or mini-drama storyline using professional comic actors. The chosen genre emphasized once again the light-hearted quality that it seemed video material was required to possess. Here, the target language was intended to be comprehensible and repeated by the learners with the emphasis on *Skills practice* – listening comprehension and after-you-watch speaking.

In the 1990s, the concept of 'active viewing' was established. Here the learner took a more active role than that of the passive viewer and the teacher began to use the interface more: freeze-framing with the remote control, segmenting long videos into shorter scenes, removing and adding subtitles, playing a video without sound, covering the screen and so on. Learners were also divided up into groups for information gap tasks such as jigsaw viewing. Although there were logistical difficulties with these kinds of activities, many of them are still pedagogically valid today.

More recently, shorter clips chosen from sites such as Vimeo or YouTube have become popular source material for educators, especially those with little or no dialogue so the class is not 'distracted' by comprehension. The tasks are often open-ended and encourage critical thinking, allowing the learners to respond to the content with their own interpretation. Clearly, working with video as *Stimulus* allows learners to focus on narration as well as on more subjective questions such as

9

analysing mood and atmosphere. Using the video as a stimulus also implies that the material itself is seen as the springboard for other activities such as discussion and debate.

Finally, examples of video as a *Resource* can be commonly found on YouTube and other sites. Online English language courses are one example as are TED talks (www.ted.com), Big Think seminars and other instructional sites such as the RSA's animated lectures (www.thersa.org/events/rsaanimate). Language courses are increasingly using video in this role, for example in blended learning programmes where video input informs and enhances the face-to-face classroom.

Sequencing of tasks

The classroom use of film clips, video and other moving image material has generally been sequenced in terms of pre-viewing, while-viewing and post-viewing tasks, although the relative emphasis on each stage and the kinds of tasks involved has varied considerably.

Before you watch

Activities typically set for this stage include prediction tasks based on stills of the video in question or questions posed by the teacher focusing on the learners' own experience or prior knowledge. Other warmer questions typically focus on activating schemata about the topic or genre of the clip to be viewed. For example, if you were going to do an activity on the ever-popular subject of movie trailers (see Activity 3.6: *The art of the trailer*), you might want to brainstorm with learners what makes a successful trailer and what its generic characteristics are. You could also ask if there are any movies that the class would currently like to see based on viewing a trailer. Assuming your learners have seen lots of trailers, you could dig deeper and ask in what way a trailer could spoil your enjoyment of a film (perhaps by showing too much of the action). All of this should activate interest without distracting the learners from the main task at hand.

In one technique that Jamie Keddie calls 'Videotelling'[1], the prediction stage is extended so as to form the body of the lesson, with the actual viewing being the culmination, even reward, for the collaborative questioning, hypothesizing or storytelling that goes on between learners and teacher. However long the 'Before you watch' stage is, eliciting a response from learners and encouraging interest in the clip prior to viewing is clearly the aim. Some other ideas for doing this, including specific prediction tasks, are as follows:

- *Narrate the content or action of the video*
  This helps learners' own visualizations. The more detailed your narration, the more vivid their visualizations. Once learners have visualized the scenes, they should be motivated to compare these with the 'real thing'.

- *Provide plenty of background information and context*
  You could use a review or another related text to engage interest. Be careful of spoilers, though. At the very least, you could refer to or explain any particular place names or cultural references.

- *Preview part of the video in class* (perhaps an easily comprehensible or impactful sequence)
  From this one stand-alone part learners can conjure up a picture of what may come before and after it.

[1] Keddie, J. (2014) *Bringing Online Video Into the Classroom*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Page 112.

- *Preview some of the key words and expressions in a word cloud*
  Learners can piece together a speech or a particularly important piece of dialogue or simply the main topics from a review, a summary or a written description of the movie clip (see Activity 2.1: *See it, read it, watch it*).

While you watch

Such tasks have varied enormously since video became an integral part of a language lesson. In early video courses, most tasks treated the video in the same way as audio, setting comprehension questions of the multiple-choice or true/false variety. With the advent of longer videos, it was customary to divide this watching into various sequences to make the material more accessible, or to ask learners to watch the same sequence on various occasions, asking different questions each time.

If there is a clear language aim, then classic 'while you watch' tasks would be gap-fills in which target items from the transcript are missing or need to be reordered. Other common tasks carried out while you watch include ticking items on a list (e.g. objects or people in the video), sequencing items on a list, taking notes, answering questions (e.g. multiple choice), etc.

However, the problem with such tasks is that it is asking the learner to do two things at once: focus on the questions and view the sequence. Also, by focusing only on language, the visual aspect of the clip is lost. In the digital age, such a problem can be partly alleviated by platforms (such as educanon. com) which allow the learners to view the video and answer the questions all on one screen.

The motivation for viewing should be more than simply 'watch and check'. It should be remembered that the visual message of any moving image sequence provides another whole layer of meaning. The visual often works alongside the verbal, reinforcing the overall message, but at times one mode can interfere with another, as when an overly intrusive soundtrack disrupts your comprehension of the screenplay or your enjoyment of the visual. The following list of alternatives to the 'while you watch' tasks focuses then on different stimuli – visual, aural, textual and cinematic.

It is important to point out that the majority of the following tasks are set by the teacher *in advance* so that learners are viewing and gathering data *while* they watch, but they are more often than not carried out *after* watching the video. All of the task types below will be included and expanded upon in separate chapters of the book.

Focus on images/objects
- Narrate what can be seen: images or objects. (This can be easily turned into a memory game for younger learners, i.e. *How many people were there?, What objects can you see and in what order?, What were they wearing?*, etc.)
- Ask learners to recall the colour, size or shape of certain objects and images.

Focus on cinematic elements
- Identify editing techniques: number of shots/cuts/scenes along a timeline (e.g. in a chase scene).
- Identify setting/atmosphere/mood created by lighting, shadows, etc.
- Identify camera movements (handheld, aerial, etc.) and shot types (close-ups, long, point-of-view, tracking, etc.) and how these affect our viewing.
- Identify visual clues to classify genre (e.g. special effects, stunts, costumes, etc.).

Language Learning with Digital Video

Focus on cultural aspects
- Identify these aspects in landscape, food, setting, behaviour, social etiquette, etc.
- Encourage critical thinking by identifying stereotypical, idealized, non-representative or anachronistic images.

Focus on text
- Use translation, dictogloss, voiceovers, etc.
- Spot differences between script and on-screen subtitles.
- Read script and predict the way it will be filmed through discussion or a storyboarding task.
- Compare the original spoken narrative with a written summary.
- Write reviews or summaries of video action or compare a simplified version of the script with the authentic one.

Focus on inference
- Identify what characters might be thinking during a sequence based on body language, etc.
- Identify the subtext of a particular scene (e.g. what the characters really mean or feel rather than what they actually say).

Focus on character types
- Identify how body language / clothes / expressions / gestures / emotions point to typical stock characters or types (e.g. hero, villain, sidekick, etc.).
- Idenfity how some stars are associated with particular roles (e.g. Woody Allen).

Focus on sound
- Predict and visualize action from sound only.
- Analyse music, sound effects, different voices, background noises and how they enhance a sense of realism (e.g. creaky floorboards in thrillers, bells chiming, etc.).
- Identify the type of sound (both diegetic: coming from the world of the story or non-diegetic: e.g. voiceover, musical score).
- Identify the link between song lyrics and visual images.
- Compare a radio version of a sequence (e.g. an adaptation) with the original film.

Focus on genre
- Identify the genre of a video from characters, music, atmosphere, etc.
- Identify to what extent a video conforms to a generic formula and where it subverts the genre (e.g. in experimental or viral advertising).
- Identify recurring symbols that carry generic meaning from film to film (e.g. the tin star badge worn by a sheriff in a western).

Focus on narrative
- Identify the temporal relationship between events. Is the narrative chronological or subversive? (e.g. the backwards narrative in the film *Memento*). Are there flashbacks or flashforwards?

- Identify the narrative drive (e.g. the conflict and resolution in a story) and narrative codes (e.g. a flickering light in a sci-fi movie meaning the arrival of extra-terrestrials).
- Say what's happening and predict what's going to happen next.
- Mute the sound and learners guess what is being said or narrated. They can do their own version dubbed over the top.

After you watch

Such tasks are typically summaries or reconstructed narratives. Some of the above 'while you watch' tasks can be reconfigured so that they also appear *after* the viewing process, focusing on the class's memory of events. Learners could complete information-gap activities here if they have been divided into different groups.

These could be closed-answer questions, such as true / false, or open-ended ones. Focusing on purely visual stimuli, learners can, for example, reorder images into a correct sequence or recall the most memorable ones. Elements of the script can be referred to, for example matching characters with particular phrases or correcting parts of a script. Such tasks are valid, but many focus on remembering and comprehending and not higher-order thinking skills such as creation or analysis. For example, if working with an advert, the 'while you watch' task may be simply take notes but the 'after you watch' one could be related to analysing the techniques employed, the market and the message (analysis) and then asking the learners to invent their own (creation). When setting a task, it is therefore important to bear in mind *when* you want the learners to carry them out. As a general rule, it is a good idea to establish the purpose of the tasks prior to watching but not overload the learners while they are watching.

2 Genres

When authentic video started to be used in the language classroom, it was mostly limited to film clips, film adaptations of novels and plays, news bulletins, and some TV programmes such as sitcoms and documentaries. With the arrival of YouTube and video sharing, we can, of course, choose from a far wider selection of genres. There are a number of new and reinvented genres. For example, with regard to advertising, fake, spoof and viral adverts now compete with regular commercials on these video channels and it is sometimes hard to tell the difference between them. Likewise, YouTube has spawned many other new genres like React (youtube.com/playlist?list=PL23C220A2C5EC0FDE) videos, which commonly show two screens – the video content itself and an image of a person reacting to it live. The viewer thus multi-tasks watching both screens at the same time.

Cinema

Traditionally, full-length films were studied in their entirety in class, often accompanied by the literary text to discuss differences between the original and the adaptation. In a flipped classroom scenario, this is still possible but to make better use of classroom time, it is advisable to show shorter clips from films and study these in greater depth. You could focus on these particular topics as sub-sections of the cinema genre: openings and endings, encounters, chase sequences, trailers, voice-overs, telephone conversations, flashbacks, soundtracks, etc. A number of tasks in the book focus on these areas.

Advertising

Adverts are an excellent resource to use in class partly because of their brevity and because they often pack a lot of creative ideas into a short space of time (see Chapter 3: *Video and persuasion*). Furthermore, learners have undoubtedly seen so many adverts in their lives that they will be able to analyse them without too much difficulty and compare them with how these products might be advertised in their own cultures. They can also bring their own adverts in to class.

Areas that can be studied here include the following: use of metaphor and imagery, association of ideas, stereotyping, the use of catchphrases, slogans and other advertising language, types of storytelling used in advertising, humour, etc. New genres such as infomercials and viral marketing campaigns can also be studied.

Advertising is an excellent way to introduce critical-thinking tasks into the classroom as learners question assumptions about certain products and how these are marketed through different techniques which persuade the potential client to consume them.

Critical-thinking tasks can be particularly well applied to charity adverts or campaign clips available online. These are good to exploit in class for a number of reasons: they can provide a strong link with issues you may be working on in class and they show how different cultures treat similar themes such as drink-driving. Learners can evaluate the effectiveness of the campaigns and visualize their own. We can analyse different strategies campaigners use to attract their audience and market an idea or concept, as well as a product.

Music videos

If there is one genre that has successfully reinvented itself in the digital age, it is the music video. Of course, we used to watch such promotional videos on music television (MTV was launched in 1981) while now YouTube and social network sites are the preferred media for viewing music. We share our favourite music videos with our friends in the same way that we might a share the image of a sunset or our pet dog.

Clearly, one of the mosts interesting things about these videos is the relationship between the visuals and the lyrics, so many of the tasks in this book focus on the degree to which the visuals intepret or symbolize the lyrics or simply represent them literally. Another advance is the way the genre has developed in style. Over the years, many well-known film directors have turned the music video into a genre of artistic merit and not the mere capture of a performance.

Finally, digital media has meant that an increasing number of cover versions of well-known songs are suddenly available for online viewing: an example of a global phenomenon that can be personalized and localized to have a particular impact in certain cultures. Nowadays, it does not surprise us to see the sailors of HMS *Ocean* singing 'All I Want for Christmas' (youtu.be/SDZcGz4vmJc), a Russian police choir performing Daft Punk's 'Get Lucky' (youtu.be/Po8B_lBULoE) or a thousand teenagers doing amateur versions from the comfort of their own bedrooms. Sometimes, these amateur fan videos get more hits than a performer's official version.

Television programmes

Arguably more of us now watch video online or on mobile devices than on television sets. We also watch more amateur videos than professional these days, but conventional television programmes can still be exploited to great effect in the classroom. Select from genres such as sitcoms, game shows,

drama, comedy programmes and reality shows, as well these ideas for non-fiction clips: highlights of sports events (useful for learners to practise their own commentaries), interviews (again interesting to get students to role play after viewing), programme trailers, documentaries (wildlife programmes are excellent for analysing different types of shots), cookery programmes (great to compare written and spoken discourse) and speeches (great for body language and emphatic language). Other options include different kinds of news such as bulletins, current affairs reports, eye-witness or 'fly-on-the-wall' reports; makeover and lifestyle shows; travel programmes; 'how-to' and science videos. Again, many of these genres are covered in tasks in the book.

Mash-ups, remixes and the YouTube generation

The fact that the YouTube generation can now play around with other people's content and invent their own visual mash-ups or collages is both highly creative and empowering. In the same way that rap can subvert musical traditions by mixing unlikely elements together to create a unique sound, the same is true of video makers working with hybrid forms. The process of making meaning through connection with other texts and media is known as *intertextuality*. Intertextuality forms the basis of many humorous programmes, for example when serious genres such as documentaries are ironized or subverted in *docu-soaps* or the words of one person are made to come out of the mouth of another.

Mash-ups are particularly prevalent in the world of music videos. When a cult song comes along like the Korean 'Gangnam Style' (in its day the most viewed video on YouTube), it spawns a number of different mash-ups. A famous example was that created by mashing-up 'Gangnam Style' with music and action from the movie *Ghostbusters* so that two songs are seamlessly linked both visually and aurally.

A different example is the mash-up of Lionel Richie's song 'Hello' created by Matthijs Vlot (see Activity 4.5: *Mash-up madness*). It consists of 43 very short clips crammed into about 80 seconds. The clips come from a number of Hollywood films so that the words said by the actors in the clips sync with the lyrics. There are many websites, such as MashVault (mashvault.com) where you can access clips of this type. However, tech tools are becoming so sophisticated that the mash-up genre is liable to evolve still further. For example, a recent video for Bob Dylan's classic 'Like a Rolling Stone' (video. bobdylan.com/desktop.html) is interactive, allowing viewers to zap through 16 television channels as a variety of television personalities lip-sync the lyrics. The stations you can sample include a cooking show, a tennis match, a children's cartoon, BBC News and a live video of Dylan playing 'Like a Rolling Stone' in 1966: as such, it's a perfect example of intertextuality.

Videos like this are undeniably fun to use in class but, like many other short-but-sweet movies available on YouTube and other sites, the original content is often brief and ephemeral and sometimes only engages lower-order cognitive skills like remembering and describing. While high on entertainment value, the visual jokes and pranks so common to YouTube do not provide much scope for exploitation. This brings us on to the whole issue of how to choose video material.

3 Criteria for selection

With a plethora of video content at hand, it is easy to get saturated by it all. At the same time, it can be very time-consuming and distracting to find the 'right' video sequence online. For this reason, the majority of the activities here represent generic frameworks which you can interpret for your own context and the resources which are available to you. There are guidelines in each activity for

alternative video sequences that can be exploited, but there will surely be others that would suit your particular context or the time in which you choose to show the video. Hopefully, these generic activities will provide inspiration for you to go and seek out those videos.

There are, however, some general guidelines that you should bear in mind when selecting a video.

- *The role of the video and the issue of comprehension*
  If its purpose is language focus, then comprehension of spoken language will be all important. Bear in mind that authentic material may be overly demanding. If showing a documentary, for example, consider grading the voice-over so learners pick up on particular structures or lexical items more easily. The visual material remains the same so learners may not feel patronised.

  If the role of the video is a stimulus (for example, to stimulate interest in another task), the need to comprehend language may not be an issue at all. In such cases, you could use the same video with many different levels, precisely because comprehension is not a key concern. It then becomes a question of grading the task not the input.

- *The length and pace of the video*
  Choose short sequences, where possible, especially if there is a focus on language or skills practice. In common with the great majority of videos on YouTube or those posted in social media, very few of the clips suggested in this book are over five minutes long. If, however, you are interested in learners responding to visual stimuli alone, the video can be a little longer. If the learners view the video first at home, then time restrictions do not apply in the same way.

- *The interface*
  Bear in mind that some websites provide subtitles and the entire transcript of a video (e.g. trackable transcripts in TED talks) – this can save you a lot of preparation time and eases the cognitive load on the learner considerably. Likewise, consider the digital tools that you have available in class and that the students have at home. Avoid setting tasks which some learners will be unable to do because of any technical restrictions.

- *Viewing in or outside class*
  If choosing a clip to be viewed outside class, you could access sites which are ideal for self-study (e.g. English Central: www.englishcentral.com) or longer clips with a high information load.

  If choosing a clip for in-class use, make sure the clip has sufficient potential to generate a number of different tasks and that these tasks generate language. A common error is to put on a video; the learners are entertained but remain passive viewers. Consider the different angles that you could adopt when learners view the video: cultural, cinematic, narrative (see above for 'while you watch' task types).

- *Relevance / interest value*
  The video clip you choose should, where possible, be relevant to the learners' lives and experience and relate in some way to the topics and / or language that you are focusing on in class. Try to integrate the video activities with other tasks that learners can do outside the classroom (e.g. making their own version of a video that you show in class) so that the link with the learners' world is apparent to them.

- *Allow learners their say*
  Be flexible enough to allow learners to introduce their own videos in class, either made or selected by them. Get them to record a video log so that they don't lose track of the clips. However, check beforehand for any inappropriate language or content. Indeed, make sure you do this for all material that you select for class.

4 Copyright issues

As Stephen Apkon[1] has commented, the intense popularity of YouTube and other video-sharing sites has meant we are now 'part of a global visual conversation' (2013, p. 23), blurring the distinction between creators and consumers. The mainstream will continue to provide content but amateurs can now make something just as interesting and share it just as quickly. In order to critique a video, users very often interact with each other's content, creating parodies and mash-ups. This raises important questions of copyright: When can we edit or 'borrow' other people's content and for what purposes?

Uploading videos to a video-sharing site

YouTube include copious information on their site about copyright, warning users not to upload content which has not been made by themselves or which they are not authorized to use (youtube. com/yt/copyright). As you would expect, you can also watch a video about this, available at the same link. Other video-sharing sites will contain similar information (for example, vimeo.com/help/faq/ legal-stuff/copyright).

Using YouTube (or similar) videos online

When a person uploads a video on to YouTube, Vimeo or any other sharing site, they can specify whether their video can be embedded on to another website. You should take care to check the specifications and permissions associated with any clip before attempting to embed it onto a separate website for teaching purposes.

Downloading YouTube videos for classroom and other uses

There are many tools and applications that allow you to 'grab' online videos from sites such as YouTube[2]. However, doing this is a breach of copyright. We advise that you do not download YouTube clips in this way.

General advice

It is inevitable that you will see examples of online videos that have violated copyright. Indeed, a lot of material you will find on video-sharing sites is of this nature. This, unfortunately, does not justify you

---

[1] Apkon, S. (2013) *The Age of the Image: Redefining Literacy in a World of Screens*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
[2] These include ClipGrab and YTD Video Downloader.

doing the same. If in doubt about whether it is legal to show a clip in class, ask your learners to watch the video in question at home and base an activity around it to do subsequently in class.

Disclaimer: *The information provided in this Copyright section is correct to the authors' knowledge at the time of publication. This section is no way intended to be taken as legal advice. It is the opinion of the authors.*

1   Video and text

This chapter looks at the role of voice-overs, subtitles, captions, scripts, screenplays and thought bubbles – in other words, the *text* that accompanies a video sequence. The popularity of today's 'silent movies' (videos that include no written or spoken word at all) on YouTube and Vimeo has meant that many teachers have forgotten or overlooked the importance of exploiting text and image. It is easy to get seduced by the beauty of these silent clips, many of which are emotionally charged and supported by moving soundtracks. However, the techniques by which these short and silent clips are exploited tend to be repetitive, for example, memorization or description of the visual stimuli. They often don't engage higher-order thinking skills.

For me, it is precisely its multi-modal quality that makes the moving image such a rich medium. One of the most positive contributions that the moving image has made in recent times is the way that it can enhance and bring to life a text of some complexity. In this respect, visual poems and visual adaptations of lectures can help these texts reach a wider and a more diverse audience.[1] (See Activity 1.7: *Dialogues* for ideas on how to exploit these kinds of multi-modal texts and Activity 5.5: *Memory* as an example of a visual poem.)

Working with the text alongside the moving image is nothing new in language teaching. A technique that was first popularized by the advent of the communicative approach was the information gap, in which the class was divided: for example, half the class watched the screen (without sound) while others read the script or subtitles. However, apart from being logistically complicated to arrange in class, I found that such tasks didn't motivate learners a great deal. There clearly was an information gap to be completed and this generated a fair amount of language; however, learners didn't have to create a text themselves to do the activity but simply summarize or reformulate what had been said by others.

What the following tasks have in common is that the learners are creating their *own* texts, categorizations or visualizations. This should motivate them to then check against the original version and notice any differences or similarities between their version and the 'real thing'. In fact, 'noticing' is a common thread running through a number of the tasks in this chapter.

Finally, an interesting aspect of working with multi-modal texts is that at times the different media – text, audio, soundtrack, video or still image – do not necessarily sit happily with each other as they are 'made up of potentially conflicting verbal, visual, and musical codes, where the different codes may be in a contradictory relationship to each other' (Meinhof, 1998, p. 5). Precisely because of these contradictions, the video genre can be an extremely innovative one, with new hybrids being created all the time (for example, see Activity 1.9: *Video-enhanced texts* for another take on a visual poem). This is easily achieved in the digital age as so many people have access to so much material simultaneously. Thus, as adaptations to existing genres are repeated and disseminated, new hybrids emerge. Copying and pasting one text into another can engender surprisingly new meanings.

---

[1] Good examples of this are the visual adaptations of Ken Robinson's lectures produced for the Royal Society of Arts, such as this one on Changing Education Paradigms: (youtu.be/zDZFcDGpL4U).

The text does not always necessarily refer to that found *within* the clip itself but can be one associated with it. See Activity 1.6: *Comment on the comments*, for example, for an analysis of the written comments made about different clips in online sharing sites such as YouTube. These texts play, after all, an important part in how we experience these videos online and may influence our opinion about them.

Finally, consider how text and moving image can be compared in other contexts – for example, a written recipe and how this changes when it is presented orally on film, a 'how-to' video and the written equivalent, a short story and its visual representation, etc. In each case, learners will see how the video enhances the text (see Activity 1.9: *Video-enhanced texts*) though they may also spoil certain visualizations – the images that we conjure up in our imaginations, which are sometimes the most vivid of all.

References

Meinhof, U. H. (1998) *Language Learning in the Age of Satellite Television*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.