

CAPTIONED VIDEO: MAKING IT WORK FOR YOU

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Introduction

For the past several decades, teachers have been continually trying to exploit and manipulate video to enhance classroom teaching and language learning. When captioned technology emerged to the forefront more than 15 years ago, many educators quickly recognized its potential in helping students process language differently via this additional modality: the printed word (Goldman, 1996; Holobow, Lambert & Sayegh, 1984; Koskinen, Wilson, Gambrell, & Neuman, 1993; Parks, 1994; Vanderplank, 1993).

However, I have noticed disappointment among some teachers who feel that this technology has not lived up to their own expectations as the learning gadget of the future. A closer analysis, however, reveals one underlying problem: many teachers have had little training in using video (captioned or uncaptioned) for language teaching purposes, and in some cases, have resorted to a "push-the-button-and-watch" teaching methodology. Specifically, we teachers often rely too heavily on the video to teach, stimulate interest, and enhance comprehension without focused and controlled teacher involvement in preparing students to receive the message.

Thus, when students still do not seem to benefit from the captions, we sometimes attribute any failure to low student

motivation, poor video quality, or equipment, not to the way we are actually using the video. All too often, we then abandon our newly-purchased machines or relegate them to an entertaining or novelty role (i.e., a Friday afternoon respite from normal activities), with little focus on language teaching. In other words, the essential obstacle to improved teaching has been that educators have been unaware of the real amount of work involved in implementing video technology in language teaching.

Preparing Students to Receive the Message

The key to using video effectively still lies in the teacher's ability to not only deliver the message, but to empower students to receive it; a basic concept that is not new. However, although the technology has evolved, simple yet effective techniques of preparing students to receive the language still lies at the crux of language learning and should not be neglected. In the end, captioned video serves to complement, not replace, a balanced combination of previewing, viewing, and postviewing (application) exercises as key components of effective learning.

A Sample Lesson

To illustrate this, I have included a short lesson plan using two 30-second clips of the same scene (one in English, the other in Japanese) from the movie *Planes*,

Trains, and Automobiles (1987, Paramount Pictures, 93 min.), one with English closed captions and the other with Japanese subtitles. (Note: Some video clips from this movie can be found on the Internet at John Candy's Sound Gallery

<http://journey.simplenet.com/candy/planes/index.html>"><http://journey.simplenet.com/candy/planes/index.html>>).

Lesson Objectives

To learn and use appropriately expressions and discourse markers in:

a. initiating a conversation; b. greeting your conversational partner; c. introducing yourself; d. using interjections to show interest (e.g., "Oh really," "How interesting," etc.); e. changing/shifting the topic of the conversation (e.g., "So," "By the way," "Tell me," etc.);

Level

High intermediate or advanced students

Teacher Preparation

1. View the video segment and create a cloze exercise using the dialogue of the scene (see the handout below). The number and selection of words you choose to delete will depend upon the level of the class; 2. Write this dialogue on the board beforehand, leaving blanks for the words you want students to fill in. Until the appropriate time, keep the dialogue out of the students' view by covering it with a piece of paper or another board (or better yet, make an OHP of the handout); 3. Prepare enough handouts of this exercise for each student.

Class Time

Three, 50-minute classes:

•Day One: previewing discussion, silent viewing, and viewing with English captions; •Day Two: viewing with Japanese subtitles (optional) and postviewing activities; •Day Three: videotaping and evaluation.

Materials

•Captioned videotape of Planes, Trains, and Automobiles (also the subtitled version in the students' native language if needed for Step 3); handout.

Evaluation

Videotape students roleplaying similar situations and then use a checklist to evaluate performance.

Movie Scene

Two men, Neal Page (Steve Martin) and Del Griffith (John Candy) have just taken their seats on a plane in preparation for takeoff. (They met briefly minutes before in the airport waiting room.) Del then turns to Neal and introduces himself.

Day One: Previewing

Freeze frame the opening shot of this scene showing Neal and Del seated next to each other on the plane. Explain that they are introducing themselves for the first time. For five minutes, have students discuss the following points with a partner:

- how you would start a conversation with a stranger .
- what kinds of topics would come up during such an encounter (e.g., basic greetings, name, jobs, hobbies, travel destination(s), family, etc.) .

- which discourse markers might be used to show shifts in the direction of the conversation (e.g., the words "so," "by the way," and "well").
- how would the level of formality change in the choice of words or expressions used depending on the age of your conversational partner.

Then, ask students to think of specific questions for each topic (e.g., for jobs, "So, what do you do for a living?" or "How do you like your job?"; a question on travel destinations might be, "And where are you heading?", etc.). Write some of these ideas on the board. Also discuss what topics of conversation or questions might be inappropriate in this situation (e.g., "How old are you?" "How much money does your job pay?" "Are you married?"). Also point the importance of using interjections and paralinguistic utterances to show interest in what your conversational partner is saying (e.g., "Oh really," "Wow." "Uh-Huh," "Oh," "No kidding," etc.). These are also needed in signaling turn-taking and in maintaining spontaneity and fluency in the conversation.

Silent Viewing without the English Captions

Before giving students the handout, have them watch the scene several times without sound and to try predict what Del and Neal are saying. Encourage students to pay attention to any modes of nonverbal communication (e.g., gestures, touch, interpersonal space, facial expressions, etc.) which might contain clues to interpreting the scene. Then have students try to fill in the blanks in the dialogue with the words from the list (the

words that would be missing on the actual handout are in bold here):

Handout

Word List: American, **nice**, fabulous, pleased, introduce, so, world, living, sales, rings.

- Del: I never did introduce myself. Del Griffith, American Light and Fixture, Director of Sales, Shower Curtain Division. I sell shower curtain rings. The best in the world. And you are?
- Neal: Uh, Neal Page.
- Del: Neal Page. Pleased to meet you, Neal Page. So, what do you do for a living, Neal Page?
- Neal: Marketing . . .
- Del: Marketing! Super, super, fabulous. Isn't that nice.

The handout formatted for classroom use is at :

<http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Techniques/Davis-CaptionedVideo/handout.html>.

Viewing with the English Captions

Next, have students, in small groups, watch and listen to the movie dialogue, and check their predictions. Then, ask students to help you fill in the dialogue on the board. Have them watch the conversation again to confirm what they have heard and then complete the rest of the conversation. This is probably the most basic viewing technique.

Day Two: Viewing with the Foreign-language Subtitles (optional)

This section is useful when the instructor can read the students' first language (in this case, Japanese). Have students watch the video the first time and write (a) the Japanese subtitles (in the case of this

scene, five lines), (b) the English translation for each, and (c) the actual English conversation they hear. Then, they should compare the three versions. Ask students why some of these sentences are different (e.g., transcribers have abbreviated the text in an attempt to maintain a reasonable reading speed; difficulty in translating culture-specific expressions; mistakes in translation, etc.).

Postviewing (or Application)

Have students listen to the conversation for a final time. Discuss what expressions, if any, could be substituted for the ones used in the dialogue (e.g., "Nice to meet you" instead of "Pleased to meet you," "Oh" for "Super," "By the way" in place of "So," etc.). Students should read the completed conversation with a partner, and then roleplay it in front of another group or the entire class.

Day Three: Videotaping and Evaluation

When possible, the third class meeting can be used to videotape students for evaluation of the language forms and overall communicative competency.

In pairs, students are each given an Identity Card which includes (a) a new name, (b) nationality and birthplace, (c) occupation, and (d) current place of residence, and are asked not to reveal to the other person what their card says. The Identity Card also explains the situation in which the two students are meeting (e.g., "You are in a hospital waiting room with your two-year old son. He starts playing with another young boy and his mother sitting next to him"). Students may add information as the conversation progresses.

Then in a separate room, the two students are videotaped for five minutes roleplaying the scenario, after which, they rate themselves using this basic checklist on a scale from 0 to 4 (students have practiced using this checklist in class beforehand). Teachers can also record their own observations for each student. Finally, the teacher and students discuss the results while reviewing the video.

Checklist

Score your performance in these areas:

(4 = excellent, 3 = good, 2 = fair, 1 = poor)

- Started the conversation naturally (or responded appropriately when spoken to)
- Used greetings appropriate to the situation
- Introduced self naturally and correctly
- Changed the topic of conversation with appropriate expressions
- Used interjections to show interest
- Exchanged all information on Identity Card

◦ TOTAL: ___ / 20 POINTS (___ %)

Other comments: _____

Once all students have finished, another consolidation or follow-up activity is to have all of the them practice again with a partner, focusing on the areas they need to improve.

Other Viewing/Self-Evaluating Options

◦ Person and Place: Have students read the transcript of the captioned dialogue as part of the previewing stage and predict: (a) who the two people are in the conversation (i.e., male or female, occupation, age, socioeconomic status, etc.), and (b) where the conversation takes place.

•Pronunciation: A spin-off activity for pronunciation practice in this particular dialogue would be to have students write both the polite and reduced forms of some of the words (e.g., "d'ya" versus "do you," "nice to meetcha" and "nice to meet you", etc.). This criterium could be added to the evaluation checklist under pronunciation.

•First-letter Cloze Exercise: Because the purpose of the activity is to build confidence in listening to real-world input, I often fill in the first letter(s) of some of the more difficult words in the handout. (Yes, perhaps students will figure out the conversation without this help, but that might be on the twenty-fifth time of repeating the scene, and they know that kind of listening skill will not help them outside the classroom.)

•For additional self-evaluation practice, I have created online listening comprehension quizzes to help students hone their skills in recognizing how to respond to initial greetings, introductions, and basic small talk. These could be used by students in a self-access center or computer lab connected to the Internet. See Randall's Cyber Listening Lab (<http://www2.gol.com/users/rsdavis/cyberlab/>)

Final Reflections

This sample lesson demonstrates the need for teachers to be actively engaged in preparing students to process the language before they actually hear it. Teachers should become familiar with basic techniques of using video which will enhance their ability to use captions effectively. Captions can play an important part in improving students

language skills, but only when coupled with other previewing, viewing, and postviewing/application activities.

References

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