

## Using Video in the EFL Lesson Plan

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(Received December 8, 1995)

### Abstract

Many students in Japan do not have the advantage of learning a foreign language, such as English, in an environment in which it is used daily and naturally. It is often desirable, therefore, for the teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the Japanese school to provide a realistic learning environment in which the students may acquire skills necessary for successful communication. Video can be used by the teacher in helping to create realistic situations. By doing so, the lesson often can be taught in a more learning-efficient manner; perhaps more so than if the EFL teacher were to only use the more traditional classroom methods. The result may be a more communicative foreign language speaker.

### Key Words

communicative, EFL, language function, non-verbal, video

### Introduction

Language teaching, particularly in industrialized societies, has often looked to technology to provide the teacher with more effective ways of teaching in the classroom. Native speakers of a target language acquire their language naturally by being in a natural setting. But of course, when the classroom is far-removed from where the target language is being used in everyday life, the teacher will often try to simulate a natural environment—or at least certain pertinent aspects of that environment—so as to promote a kind of natural language acquisition on the part of the learner. Aspects of the target language such as intonation patterns, gestures, and conversational strategies, are examples of what the teacher may feel essential for the learner to experience.

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To do this, the teacher must have at hand the means of simulation.

Effective simulation tools that are currently available to most teachers are the video camera and player. While the use of audio tape alone can provide a good deal of the language to the student—vocabulary, phrasing, intonation, and so forth—a critical part of communication is missing: the non-verbal component. (By non-verbal, we mean communication which is not spoken, such as facial expressions, hand and body gestures, and physical proximity—the distance between the speakers.) Also important is the setting in which this interaction takes place. In fact, non-verbal communication can often comprise most of the communication in a language exchange, and it is therefore essential that the language learner see this and feel that an actual person is speaking, that the communication is at least virtually realistic. This virtual realism can be experienced through video, and this is one of the major advantages of using video in a language lesson.

### Functional Approach<sup>2</sup>

Many of the more popular (and successful) language teaching techniques in the EFL and ESL (English as a Second Language) field are based to some extent on the Functional approach. In this approach, the language learner sees the target language as a set of tools, or phrases. These tools can be used to get things done with the language (asking for an opinion, giving directions, describing something, etc.) By approaching a language in this way, teachers can enable their students to begin using the language in a relatively short length of time.<sup>3</sup>

The Functional approach is used extensively in the teaching examples presented here.

### The Learning Objective

A learning objective is the goal, or purpose, of the lesson—what the teacher wants the students to understand or be able to do. Stating the learning objective at the beginning of the lesson helps both the teacher and the student focus on the language function being taught. It also shows the student the importance of the lesson, and may encourage greater attention and participation.

A simple way to do this is to begin the lesson by writing on the board, "At the end of this lesson, you will be able to ...*(language function)*."

### Small-Group Learning

To provide a good environment for encouraging communication, the class can be arranged into small groups of students (between two and four members in each

group). They work together at separate group tables, or at their desks placed in groups, so that they can either remain isolated from the rest of the class or can turn and join other groups, depending on the activity. This is especially useful when the teacher must deal with large classes.

When this is done, the teacher is no longer the center of learning, but assumes the role of advisor or "tour guide", and is free to move from one group to another to offer individualized or group help, without requiring the attention of the entire class. In this way, being left to work by themselves in small groups, the students really feel that their group's work is important, and that their own contributions are needed. In this way, too, learning is much more active, and it is concentrated: in a small group each student will need to speak often.

Some advantages to the "small-group" student-centered classroom are that students might feel more at ease when speaking in small groups, rather than to the entire class. They may be less inhibited from trying out new phrases if only a few people are listening to them. Also, working in small groups often promotes an active interest in the language activity.

Some disadvantages are that it may be difficult at the "absolute beginner" level (however, it can be used effectively with more teacher interaction). Also, an adjustment period may be required for the student to get used to this learning style.

Most of the methods presented here in using video are learning methods which require the students to work together, using English in a communicative way.

### Teaching Ideas and Sample Lessons

We will now look at a few examples of how language learning can be made more effective using video in the lesson plan. (In most cases, the heading for each example below is the language function. The lesson's learning objective includes the primary language function to be taught.)

#### *Identifying and Describing Locations of Things*

**Learning Objective:** At the end of this lesson, the student should be able to understand and use simple prepositions describing the locations of things.

Before the lesson, the teacher makes a video showing various objects, such as a pencil, a cup, a small toy, a sneaker, a stone, etc. The more unusual the objects, the more interesting the video will be. The objects are seen according to the prepositions to be taught, such as those listed below in Step 3, Dictation. (For example: a hand places the stone to the right of the cup.)

Sample lesson plan:

1. State the learning objective (by writing it on the board): "At the end of this lesson, you should be able to say where things are."
2. Divide the class into small groups (two to four per group).
3. Give the entire class a dictation of the following *locations* phrases. (Notice that the article *the* is included as part of the phrase, for the reason that it is too often left out and the student should understand that it is an essential part of the phrase):

to the right of the

to the left of the

in front of the

behind the

above the

below the

on the

in the

4. Show the video. Teacher demonstrates the phrases.
5. a) The students then look at their own dictations and make as many corrections as they can.  
b) They then compare their dictations with others in their group, and make any additional corrections.  
c) Finally, the teacher checks the dictations as a class.
6. Show the video again, asking *Wh-* questions (such as "Where is the pencil?"). During this phase, the students complete the following sentences:

The pencil is _____
The apple is _____
The apple is _____
The elephant is _____
The bird is _____
The key is _____
The shoe is _____

7. Show the video again, starting and stopping it in various places, and asking students in each group questions about where things are (interaction between students and video).
8. Students practice in their groups using pens, notebooks, sneakers, baseball gloves, stuffed animals, etc. The teacher moves from group to group, asking questions and checking responses.
9. *OPTIONAL*: Show a video skit using the phrases in a "real life" situation, such as a scene from TV. Students have a list of the phrases, and they mark the ones they hear or see. Also, they could answer questions after viewing the skit, such as "Where was the table?", focusing on a variety of tenses.

### *Describing Actions*

Learning Objective: At the end of this lesson, the student should be able to say what happened, using simple phrases.

This lesson might be taught after the students are able to use present tense verb forms.

Before the lesson, the teacher makes a video of various actions being performed. As in the previous example, the more unusual the scene, the more interesting the video will be. The actions are performed according to the action descriptions to be taught, such as those listed below in Step 2, Dictation, and the cloze exercise in Step 3.

### Sample lesson plan:

1. The teacher states the learning objective: "At the end of this lesson, you

should be able to say what happened.”

2. The teacher gives the class a dictation of verb phrases that will be used in the video:

slid the pencil

moved it

walked to the

wrote a letter

got up from the table

walked away

he stood on it

jumped off

walked back to the

sat down

picked up

drank it

put it

3. Cloze Exercise: The teacher hands out a written description of the steps (as a narration) of what will be seen in the video, with verbs and phrases of sequence left out:

*Cloze Exercise*

1. He \_\_\_\_\_ the pencil \_\_\_\_\_ on the table, and then \_\_\_\_\_ it \_\_\_\_\_ the left.
2. He \_\_\_\_\_ to the table \_\_\_\_\_ sat down. Then he \_\_\_\_\_ a letter.
3. He \_\_\_\_\_ up \_\_\_\_\_ the table, and \_\_\_\_\_ away.
4. First he \_\_\_\_\_ over to the chair. \_\_\_\_\_ he stood on it, and \_\_\_\_\_ off.
5. He \_\_\_\_\_ back to the table and \_\_\_\_\_ down.
6. Then he \_\_\_\_\_ up a glass of water and \_\_\_\_\_ it.
7. Finally, he \_\_\_\_\_ up the chair, \_\_\_\_\_ it on top of the table, and \_\_\_\_\_ away.

4. The class watches the video.
5. The students complete the cloze exercise individually and then in pairs, and then the exercise is checked as a class.

6. Practice may take the form of each student in a group telling the person to their right to do something from the dictation list. The person on their left must describe what is being done (or what was done, depending on the verb tense being focused on).

#### **Additional *Describing Actions* Ideas**

Other activities may include jumping rope, cooking, using a vending machine, starting a car, and so forth. Several variations of the actions can be made. Students can determine which written description or audio narration matches the video they are watching (they can also determine whether or not a narration matches a scene: True/False).

#### **Sample Lesson Plan (Advanced levels) :**

1. Students form pairs (Student A and Student B). In pairs: only Student A watches, and then describes the steps to Student B.
2. Student B can ask questions for clarification. Writes up steps. Watches video and discusses any discrepancies. (Note: Student A may use "false steps", wherein Student B must identify these after watching the video.)
3. This can be useful for working with a variety of tenses.

#### ***Guessing***

A very important activity that takes place during conversations is guessing. Guessing includes inference, deduction, and other problem-solving techniques that each of us does whenever we try to understand what another person is saying to us. The ability to guess accurately is an important skill used by "successful" communicators in a foreign language—often times it is the key to comprehension in a conversational exchange where at least one of the participants is a non-native speaker.

Here, then, are a few activities that can help strengthen the EFL student's skills in guessing correctly, by trying to infer from a field of aural and visual information what has already happened, is happening, and will happen.

The scenes that are selected for use in these guessing tasks should be unusual, even unexpected. Scenes from TV game shows and comedy films are particularly successful for these activities. The students work in pairs (A and B).

*Guessing from Audio and Video*

1. Student A watches with no audio (the teacher turns off the sound). Student A guesses what the dialog or general ideas or topic might be, and writes it down in note form.
2. Student B listens to the audio with no video (the screen can be covered up, or the TV turned around). Student B guesses what the dialog or general ideas or topic might be, and writes it down in note form. Student B also tries to guess a description of the scene, the characters, etc.
3. Students A and B compare their guesses, focusing on questions such as "Who/What/Where/When/Why".
4. Both students then watch and listen to the scene, and compare their ideas.

*Three Ideas Based on One Video Scene*

The scene I have used for these activities is that of a man who is bowling on a makeshift bowling alley set up in the middle of 57th Street in New York City. He bowls the ball into a pyramid of brandy glasses in flames.

The students work in pairs (A and B).

*• 20 Questions*

Only Student A watches the scene. Student B must find out as much about the scene as possible by asking Student A 20 "Yes/No" questions, and tries to describe the scene to Student A. Student A makes appropriate corrections until Student B can describe the scene accurately. Both then watch the scene.

*• T/F*

Only Student A watches the scene. Student A describes the scene to B, but *may* do it with false information. Student B watches it and determines whether A's description was True or False. *Note:* If it was False, Student B must describe the difference(s).

*• What's Next?*

Students A and B watch only the 1st part of the scene. They try to guess and discuss what will happen next. (Useful for using modals: *might, should, wouldn't, etc.*)

*Getting Information (I)* (from a movie scene)

The learning objective, here, is to get information. While this can be a rather broad goal, it is understood that the student is to get certain information that

is defined, or categorized, by the teacher, in the form of multiple-choice questions. Of course, other formats, such as open-ended comprehension questions, where the student must write in the answer, can also be used. It all depends upon the level of the class, the teacher's own teaching style, and so forth.

For this example, a scene from the movie *The Birds* has been selected. In this scene, a woman drives into a strange town, and asks a local shopkeeper for information about someone she wants to visit. The information she needs is basic to many situations, and the questions she asks in the scene are those commonly asked by many language students in the classroom setting: "Where does he live?", "What is her name?", "How do I get there?", etc.

The teacher can make up these questions and answer choices, or for upper-level students, students can make up the questions. Students can even make up the answer choices for each other. Or, the teacher can write the answer choices, and students write the questions based on them, etc. There is truly an endless number of possibilities for designing a lesson based on this task of getting information.

Sample lesson plan:

1. The teacher states the learning objective: "At the end of this lesson, you should be able to understand basic information."
2. The teacher hands out the questions, and the students read through them to familiarize themselves with what to listen for.
3. The class watches the scene, and then answers the questions. (This may be repeated a number of times, until the teacher feels sure that at least most of the students have got the required information.)
4. The students compare their answers, and the teacher plays the scene through again. This time, the teacher starts and stops the scene at places relevant to the questions, and asks students for the information.

Below is an example of a multiple-choice question exercise:

1. Why did the woman stop at the post office?
  - a. She wanted to rent a boat.

- b. She wanted to find Mitchell Brenner.
  - c. She had a letter for Mitchell Brenner.
  - d. She wanted to find out the schoolteacher's name.
2. Where does Mitchell Brenner live?
- a. Right there, next to the post office.
  - b. With his wife and child.
  - c. Across the bay, in a white house.
  - d. Between two trees on the other side of the school.
3. Why did she want a boat?
- a. She didn't want to drive her car to the school.
  - b. She wanted him to order her one.
  - c. She wanted to surprise the Brenners.
  - d. She thought it would be quicker.
4. How soon does she want the boat?
- a. In about 20 minutes.
  - b. Immediately.
  - c. After she visits the Brenners.
  - d. Tomorrow at 2 pm.
5. Why did the man make a telephone call?
- a. We don't know.
  - b. To talk with Mitchell Brenner.
  - c. To talk with Annie Hayworth.
  - d. To rent a boat for the woman.

*Getting Information (II)* (from a conversation)

For this task, the class watches a conversation between two or three people. The example used here is based on a chat between two friends, a man and a woman, about cars.

Questions may take the form of comprehension questions where the student must write in the information. (Of course, multiple-choice type questions may also be used.)

1. What is the *general topic* they are discussing? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What would the man *rather* have?

- a. a new Mercedes
  - b. an old Mercedes
  - c. a new Toyota
3. What does the man like about cars? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What would the woman *rather* do?
- a. own a Mercedes
  - b. work on an old car
  - c. have the government make all cars illegal
5. How does the man feel about public transportation? \_\_\_\_\_
6. List three opinions given by each person:

The Man:

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The Woman:

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**Guessing Likes and Dislikes**

**Learning Objective:** "At the end of this lesson, you should be able to tell whether a person likes or dislikes something, when using simple phrases."

After teaching various expressions that indicate *like* or *dislike* (such as *I love...*, *I can't stand...*, *...is absolutely awful!*, *I don't mind it*, etc.), the students watch a series of *like* and *dislike* utterances, and check the appropriate box according to what they hear (see the example answer form below).

		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>likes:</b>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>dislikes:</b>	✓	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### *Responding with Opinions*

**Learning Objective:** "At the end of this lesson, you should be able to say whether you like or dislike something."

Here, the student has the chance to respond to questions concerning their likes and dislikes. In the video, two people ask each other things like *Do you like to fly?*, or *What do you think of video games?*, and then they turn to the camera and ask the student the same question. The student answers either by speaking "back" to the screen, or writing the answers down.

### *Making Suggestions*

**Learning Objective:** "At the end of this lesson, you should be able to offer suggestions, using simple phrases."

The student has the chance to respond to problems a person on the screen complains about, by offering a suggestion. In the video, a person describes a problem they are having, such as *I need a good book to read*, *My neighbors are so noisy*, *I can't sleep at night!*, and *I don't feel very well*. The student offer a suggestion (*Why don't you...*, *How about...?*, etc.) either by speaking "back" to the screen, or writing the suggestions down.

### *Using Commercials*

Even if a camera is not available, there are still many ideas that can be used in the language classroom. Examples include using "found" video materials, such as TV commercials, that may be taped from regular TV broadcasts.

In the example below, a TV commercial has been taken from U.S. television. The script is written down, and certain words are clozed (deleted). The teacher may decide to delete words relevant to a grammar lesson (for example, the verbs or pronouns are deleted, etc.), focusing on those particular word forms. Or, to focus on general comprehension, every sixth or every tenth word may be deleted.

#### Sample lesson plan:

1. Hand out the script of the commercial with certain words clozed out.
2. Show commercial, and complete the cloze exercise. Check in groups, then as a class.
3. *Note:* An Assistant English Teacher (AET) or other English-speaker can be of great help in transcribing the script.

### *Student-Made Tapes*

Students can make their own tapes, based on a function or grammar point they've learned in class. This activity may be a good indicator of how well they have understood a previous lesson. For example, after watching the lesson on *Responding With Opinions*, they might try their hand at making their own tape on this topic.

Students may also make their own "commercials". By making a TV ad for their club, or a special event such as Sports Day, it can be a good way to focus on persuasive language. (Please see the *Appendix* for video production considerations.)

### **Summary**

The video player and camera, which today are relatively simple to operate and readily available to most, can be of practical use to the teacher in presenting an EFL lesson. Video can help simulate for the student an environment where more natural, communicative language use can be promoted, and thus facilitate foreign language acquisition. The student's acquisition of communication skills can be augmented through video, which makes the language more accessible and usable.

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### **Appendix: Considerations for Making Videos<sup>4</sup>**

#### **A. Production Possibilities**

1. Video made by the teacher (and teaching staff) beforehand
2. Video made with the help of the students
3. Video made by the students with the help of the teacher
4. Video made entirely by the students themselves

*NOTE:* For students who are unfamiliar with video, the teacher might want to try #2 as a training session until they are used to the equipment. Then move on to #3, and then let them try #4.

#### **B. Planning Stages**

1. Determine objectives and language items to be covered
2. Balance the needs for equipment, props, and people with those resources that actually are available
3. Plan the lesson; write the script
4. Rehearse and tape

- C. Equipment needs: camera/recorder, microphone, lights, scenery, people, etc.
  - D. Quality of picture and sound must be good enough so that students can see and hear clearly, even from the back of the room. Use close-ups, and place the microphone close to the speaker.
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### Notes and References

- 1 Many of the ideas described here were presented by the author at the *Japan Association of Language Teachers / Akita Chapter Presentation*, October, 1994, and at the *High School English Teachers Seminar for the Tohoku and Hokkaido Districts*, Hanamaki, November, 1995.
- 2 For a more complete description of the term "language function", see Unher, M. and Unher, S. *Communicative Aspects of Teaching English and a Look at the Course New Horizon*. *The Journal of the Center of Educational Research and Practices*, No. 5 (1995).
- 3 The standard reference for the Functional Approach in language learning, including a comprehensive catalog of functional phrases and lexical items, is: Van Ek, J.A. and L. G. Alexander. *Threshold Level English*, Pergamon Press, 1975.
- 4 A good text on using video is *Video*, by R. Cooper, et. al., published by Oxford University Press, 1991. It is part of the *Resource Books for Teachers Series*, edited by Alan Maley.