

Video in Language Teaching

Jack Lonergan

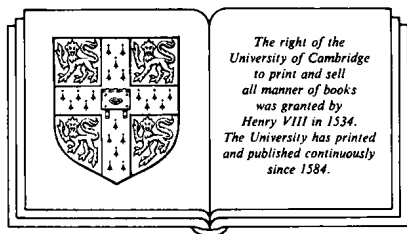


NEW DIRECTIONS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Cambridge University Press

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Jack Lonergan



Cambridge University Press
Cambridge
New York Port Chester
Melbourne Sydney

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1984

First published 1984
Fifth printing 1990

Printed in Great Britain
at the University Press, Cambridge

Library of Congress catalogue card number: 83-20869

British Library cataloguing in publication data

Loneragan, Jack

Video in language teaching. – (New
directions in language teaching)

1. Languages, Modern – Study and teaching
– Audio-visual aids
2. Video tape recorders and recordings

I. Title II. Series
418'.007'8 PB36

ISBN 0 521 25270 9 hardback
ISBN 0 521 27263 7 paperback

Video in Language Teaching

NEW DIRECTIONS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
Editors: Howard B. Altman and Peter Stevens

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Thanks

My close involvement with multi-media language teaching began in the fortunate context of running the federal teacher-training scheme set up to introduce *Follow Me* into adult education institutions in West Germany. I owe a great deal to the many teachers and teacher trainers who worked on that project, and particularly to Tony Fitzpatrick, Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband; Heinz Gaderer, Verband Oesterreichischer Volkshochschulen; and Brian Hill, Brighton Polytechnic. Both then and subsequently, the co-operation and support of producers and publishers of language-teaching television and video materials have been crucial to the development of ideas, and I express my thanks to the following and their colleagues: Beatriz Casoy, Evans Bros.; Michael Cass, Longman Group; Peter Collier, Cornelsen and Oxford University Press; Doug Davidson, Nelson Filmscan; Bruce Duncan-Smith, Formavision, Paris; Chris Faram, BBC English by Radio; Hugh Howse, BBC English by Radio and Television; Mary Law, Thames Television; John McGovern, British Council; Jean-Michel Ploton, Armand-Colin / Longman; Gerhard Vogel, Norddeutscher Rundfunk; Horst Weise, Bayerischer Rundfunk.

Detailed advice on this manuscript has been gratefully accepted from Peter Donovan at Cambridge University Press. The hectic manuscript preparation was dealt with by Valerie Davidson, whom I thank gratefully. The calm and constancy of home life which provides an environment for writing a book is supplied by my wife, whom I cannot thank enough.

Jack Lonergan
London 1983

A note on copying video material

The copying and off-air recording of broadcast and published video material is usually illegal if unauthorised. The techniques for using video in language teaching described in this book apply strictly to authorised use of video material. Those intending to use such material should ensure that permission to record or duplicate material is obtained from the copyright holder. In some cases, educational use of off-air recording may be allowed within specified limitations. However, it is the responsibility of the user to ensure that permission to copy broadcast or published video material exists before any such copies are made.

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Introduction

The purpose of this book

Video in the classroom offers exciting possibilities for language teaching and learning. This book is intended to be a practical guide to the use of video in the language classroom. The principles of effective teaching and learning are illustrated with examples from a wide range of material, at all levels of language learning.

Most of the examples are taken from English language teaching; the examples from French and German demonstrate that the principles are applicable to any language. Consequently, this book is intended for teachers and teacher trainers concerned with the teaching of any foreign language. The methodological implications of using video in class mean that this book can also benefit course designers, materials writers, and producers and publishers of language-teaching materials on video tape.

The term 'video' is often used to mean quite different things in language teaching. For some, it means no more than replaying television programmes on a video recorder, for viewing in class or private study. For others, it implies the use of a video camera in class to record and play back to learners their activities and achievements in a foreign language. These and many other uses of video equipment are discussed fully in this book. The distinctions between the various activities are, of course, made clear.

This book is not intended as a technical guide to the range of equipment that new technology is making available to language teachers. Nor can it be concerned in detail with the specifications and performance of equipment now on the market or being developed. However, a brief guide to how video equipment works is included in chapter 10. Throughout the book there are references to technical facilities on video equipment and how they can be used effectively in the language classroom.

The aim of most language learning is to acquire the ability to communicate with others in the target language. The process of language teaching and learning should also be communicative. The examples in this book assume a communicative approach to language teaching. But the theme is the classroom use of video equipment. This means that the descriptions of the various ways in which the equipment can be used in class must influence the structure of the book. The chapters are presented in a sequence

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which can serve as a guided introduction to the use of video for those with little previous experience. Others will be able to draw on any relevant part of the book, as appropriate to their specific needs in their own particular language teaching and learning situations.

Background to the book

Language-teaching programmes form a significant part of educational broadcasting, especially in Western Europe. Radio and television have made important contributions to foreign language learning.

The widespread use of video recorders has had two main effects on language-teaching broadcasts. The first of these is to free teaching institutions and learners from the constraints of the broadcasting timetable. Video recorders can be used to store programmes for showing at any convenient time. The second change concerns how television programmes are made. Appreciating the benefits that a video recorder brings into the classroom, more producers of language-teaching materials are designing video tape materials with the classroom exploitation in mind. Four or five minutes of video tape material can easily provide enough stimulating input for one hour's teaching. There has consequently been a move away from twenty-minute or half-hour programmes, towards programmes which can be conveniently subdivided into sections of only a few minutes length. A central theme in this book is how to maximise those few minutes in terms of language-learning potential.

Organisation of the book

Each chapter and subsection deals with one particular aspect of teaching with video, as the headings indicate. This is intended to be helpful in a practical guide to the use of video in the classroom, though it means that topics are treated in isolation. Where practical, cross-references are made to other aspects of language teaching. Throughout, topics are illustrated with extracts from language-teaching courses, and the teacher is invited to transfer principles illustrated in one section of the book to other examples in the book or to the local language-teaching situation.

Chapter 1 introduces video films as a language-teaching aid. Teaching with a video can be exciting, but it is not a new methodology. The main principles of good language teaching can be applied to video equipment, which remains nevertheless an additional resource.

Although video presentations are stimulating, and generally capture the interest of viewers, it is disheartening for language learners to be unable to follow a sequence because of language difficulties. In chapter 2

several suggestions are made for helping language learners to follow video sequences. Chapter 3 shows how the transition from viewing and comprehension to active production can be made. At this stage in the language-learning process, the material on the video is likely to be treated as a model, to be imitated in some degree by the learners.

In chapter 4 attention is drawn to the wealth of visual information that is presented on video. Aspects of communication such as gestures and facial expressions are exploited for a variety of language-learning activities. Consideration is also given to the way language functions in specific communicative situations.

Television and video are powerful media which apparently offer little chance for interaction between screen and viewer. Some of the suggestions made in the book attempt to overcome this. In chapter 5 a detailed account is given of how language-learning activities can develop from the media input. It is important that language learners recognise how the communicative content of video presentations can be related to their own language-learning needs.

The soundtrack of video tapes carries an important part of the communicative message. In chapter 6 there are various suggestions for developing language activities based on the soundtrack.

The assumption is made in most of the book that language teachers using video will have access to appropriate language-teaching materials. It is clear that in many teaching institutions these are not available; or that other materials are needed to supplement them. Subject to local copyright restrictions, recordings can be made of television broadcasts, and these can be used for stimulating language work. Several approaches to the use of off-air recordings are given in chapter 7. Professional broadcasts bring a level of expertise and excellence into the classroom that language teachers can never match. Nevertheless, it is exciting and stimulating to work with a video camera with language learners. Chapter 8 offers a simple introduction to operating a video camera; the assumption is made that the teacher has the minimum equipment: one video camera only. Further suggestions for making video recordings with learners are given in chapter 9. Chapter 10 offers a beginner's introduction to video equipment.

Some topics have been deliberately excluded from this book. For example, the interesting experiment in offering a language test on national television to the population as a whole (carried out in West Germany in connection with the *Follow Me* project in 1980) has been ignored. Similarly, the fascinating possibilities of high-quality information retrieval offered by video discs are also excluded. However, the book will succeed if it makes teachers and teacher trainers aware of the existing possibilities for using video equipment in the classroom, and encourages them to make the most of this valuable resource.

1 Video films as a language-teaching aid

1.1 The communicative value of video films

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 shown in a context, and the many factors in communication can be perceived easily by viewers – and language learners.

The speakers in dialogues can be seen and heard; other participants in the situation can be seen. The language learner can readily see the ages of the participants; their sex; perhaps their relationships one to another; their dress, social status, and what they are doing; and perhaps their mood or feelings. Further, paralinguistic information, such as facial expressions or hand gestures, is available to accompany aural clues of intonation.

Similarly, the setting of the communication is clear: the language learner can see on the screen where the action is taking place. This information may help to clarify whether the situation is very formal, or perhaps informal.

Of course, these audio-visual features of video films are found in cinema films and television broadcasts too. But these other media do not offer the same facilities for classroom exploitation of the material and content that video recorders do. How to make the best use of the rich resources of video recordings forms the main part of this book.

A further feature of video recordings – which is shared with other related media – is the use of electronic tricks to create special effects and images. These are usually quite beyond the resources of the language teacher to produce, and provide another valuable source of material for use in language teaching and learning.

1.2 The power of the medium

The power of television as a medium is acknowledged by all, even if its benefits and disadvantages are a matter for controversy. Video films in language teaching have advantages and drawbacks which spring from the

power of television as a medium. At their best, video presentations will be intrinsically interesting to language learners. The learner will want to watch, even if comprehension is limited. The material should be motivating; the learner should want to see more, to ask questions, to follow up ideas and suggestions. By generating interest and motivation, the video films can create a climate for successful learning. However, most learners are used to watching television screens in a domestic context: feature films, plays, quizzes, variety shows, news and sports programmes are the staple diet of television broadcasts. The vast majority of viewers watch for relaxation and entertainment; they are pleased that the television has so much to offer. They are also pleased that the television makes no demands on them; the output of the television is available to all at the end of a working day, for example – and there is no need to take any special action. In a language-learning context, there is a need for special action: inter-action with the video.

1.3 The role of the teacher

As in most language-teaching situations, the role of the teacher is a key one. It is the teacher who must harness the power of the video films; it is the teacher who has the prime responsibility for creating a successful learning environment.

Video is another useful aid for the language teacher. It is not meant to rival or overshadow the teacher, still less replace her or him. By the skilful use of the various techniques that modern technology makes available, language teachers can choose to present video materials to learners in the most suitable way for facilitating successful language acquisition. In this, teachers should be helped by support materials supplied with the video films, or which they devise for themselves. Many video films incorporate sequences specially designed for classroom use. Some examples of this are given in later chapters.

If a video camera is used in class, the responsibility for the video film, and how it is used, will also lie with the teacher – certainly in the early stages with any particular class. In a later chapter, we discuss how learners can co-operate in producing video material, and some considerations for the teacher when playing self-made materials to the learners.

The successful use of any teaching aid – printed materials, blackboards, flashcards, overhead projectors, and so on – presupposes the successful application of certain pedagogical principles to teaching. This applies to the use of video in class too, and is the main concern of the various chapters of this book. Yet for many teachers, working with video recorders and cameras is a new experience. As such, technical considera-

tions and problems can dominate the activity. Teachers might not be sure which cable is which, which button performs which function; there may be embarrassment all round if there is a technical fault which the teacher cannot repair. This insecurity can lead teachers to doing nothing else with video films than switching them on, letting the class watch them, and then turning them off. The rest of the lesson then proceeds as though there has been no use of the video at all.

It is clear that teachers must be confident and competent when handling the video equipment: chapter 10 offers an absolute beginner's guide to the controls on a video recorder. The examples given in the following chapters include some which are specifically designed to introduce teachers to working with video equipment – recorders and cameras. However, the responsibility for successful language learning does not rest with the teacher alone; she or he might create the right conditions for language learning, but the learners must respond to the situation.

1.4 The role of the learner

Watching video films for language-learning purposes should be an active process by the learners. Yet most language learners will be experienced in passive television viewing as domestic viewing tends to be passive. The support materials made by the teacher or supplied with the films should encourage positive viewing by the learners; they must participate so that the output from the video is not just one-way, to an unresponsive audience. Techniques for promoting active viewing are given in the next chapter; and in later chapters there is discussion of ways in which this active viewing can be transferred to group-work activities among the learners.

Many learners have difficulty relating to video as a valuable teaching aid. Domestic television has such strong connotations of entertainment that the expectation of many learners, when watching video language-teaching material, is that they are to be entertained. Although there is a need for language-teaching materials to be entertaining, the nature of the entertainment is of course quite different. It is essential, therefore, that learners are introduced gradually to video in the classroom, and guided to an understanding of how valuable the medium can be.

If learners are to be recorded on video tape, with a camera in the class, this point is equally relevant. It may take some time for initial feelings of amusement, embarrassment or insecurity to die down. The first shock of seeing the complete self-image on screen is often greater than hearing one's own voice recorded on audio tape for the first time.

But when learners are at ease with the video equipment, and appreciate

the positive benefits for language learning when it is used constructively, the way is open to a wide variety of learner-centred activities.

With recorded video materials, learners can take responsibility for choosing sequences for review; learners can stop films when they are interesting, and ask their own questions about what is presented. Used in the library mode, providing self-access or private-study facilities for learners, the same materials can be a stimulating source of language material which the learner can control.

If a video camera is available, then the learners can take over the role of producer. Rather than the teacher merely recording what the learners say or do, the learners themselves set up projects – in the target language. This may involve scripting, speaking, interviewing, reporting – in fact, a wide range of interesting, highly motivating activities that a learner can identify with.

In short: the role of the learner is to be a creative member in a joint partnership – the video equipment, the teacher, and the learner.

1.5 The variety of video materials

Video materials used in language teaching can come from a wide variety of sources. The techniques for using the video in class outlined in the following chapters can be used, as appropriate, with different sorts of films, whether they were designed for language-teaching purposes or not. We can categorise the sources of video films broadly as follows:

- video recordings of language-teaching broadcasts and films;
- video recordings of domestic television broadcasts, such as comedy programmes and news programmes;
- video recordings of specialist films and television programmes, such as documentaries produced by industry, or educational programmes;
- video language-teaching materials made for the classroom rather than for public transmission as broadcasts;
- self-made video films, involving the teachers and learners.

The term ‘video film’ is used rather loosely. Film is a photographic process, involving the effects of light and chemicals on sensitive paper. Holiday snapshots and cinema films are made on photographic film. Recording on video tape is an electronic process, using magnetic tape. Audio cassette and video camera recordings are made on magnetic tape. The material shown on domestic television is drawn from both sources, but broadcast electronically. Any recordings of broadcasts made on a video recorder are also on video (magnetic) tape. When played back on the television screen, these video materials look like small screen films – and so the inaccurate term ‘video films’.

Video recordings of language-teaching broadcasts and films

Films made for language teaching have the obvious merit of being planned and produced for a language-learning audience. This means that the language may be graded, and that the presentation of new vocabulary items, structures, or speech exponents will be controlled. The film is likely to have an explicit language-learning goal, expressed in terms of language structures or a level of communicative ability; and if not, accompanying written materials might be available to guide classroom discussions of what is presented on film. The language used and the situations shown are likely to relate well to other published materials, such as study guides and course books, or to recognised syllabuses or examinations.

These and other features of films made for broadcast are attractive to both teachers and learners. Nonetheless, broadcasts have disadvantages, too, which are still evident when the films are shown on video. The video recording offers the facility of seeing the original broadcast many times over, and so the problem of the ephemerality of broadcasts is overcome. But broadcasts – and films – are designed to be seen in one sitting, with no interruptions, no replays, no slow motion. The following chapters demonstrate how important it is that a selection should be made from films when they are shown on video equipment in class; how the facilities of the video recorder should be exploited to gain the maximum benefit from the films.

Video recordings of domestic television broadcasts

These materials, which have not been produced for language-teaching purposes, can be used in the classroom to bring to language learning the same benefits as the use of other realia, such as newspaper articles, magazine pictures, or popular records. They are real and meaningful; and they have a relevance to the learner which transcends the immediate needs of language learning.

There are occasions when it is quite legitimate just to play a recording of a broadcast, using the video recorder to show television programmes at a time convenient for the learners. For example, during an intensive residential course many learners might welcome the chance to relax for the evening in front of an adventure movie in the target language. But, generally speaking, such material needs preparation and follow-up work, and presentation to the learner in shorter sequences than the whole film. The use of the word 'legitimate' above refers of course to pedagogical considerations, rather than legal aspects of using recordings of television broadcasts. Many feature films and documentaries are available for sale or hire in video cassette form. It is important to remember that in many

countries, recording material off-air from broadcasts, or re-copying recordings, infringes copyright and is illegal.

Video recordings of specialist films and television programmes

Many industries and individual companies produce films to inform the general public and specialists about aspects of their work. These films, which may have their roots in public relations as well as education, are usually readily available on video cassette, often with fewer copyright restrictions than ordinary television broadcasts. Similarly, programmes made for the educational channels of broadcasting authorities are usually available to the public, with few copyright problems affecting their use in language-teaching institutions.

The thematic content of many of these films means that they are particularly suitable for courses in language for specific purposes; some suggestions for using these films are given below. A possible problem, unless the learners are advanced, is the level of language used in specialist films. For many teachers of, say, French in non-Francophone countries, such films are not available anyway. In this case, films recorded in the native language can still be adapted for, say, French language-training purposes: the original soundtrack is ignored, and the visual information is used for language work.

Video language materials made for the classroom

Video materials made for the classroom (or self-study unit) can have all the advantages that the medium of television brings, as well as being designed specially for the purpose of educational use. Just as it is standard practice to make audio cassette materials in a way different from radio broadcasts, so these video films are quite different in construction from the usual television language broadcasts. In the broadcast mode, television programmes are presented in a linear fashion: the programme starts, and progresses without pauses or review to the end. The viewer cannot stop, consider, or look again at an earlier passage – as a reader can with this book, for example. Language programmes made specifically for video take into account the fact that the video recorder does allow for selective viewing, which breaks into linear progression of the programme. And television broadcasts, once on video tape, can be treated in the same way as the video programmes (see chapter 7).

The developments in technology and the spread of video equipment into homes, offices and educational institutions all indicate that these types of language-learning materials will become increasingly popular, both for classroom work, and self-study.