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Increasing the Effectiveness of Audio-Visual Materials in English Language Classrooms—Case Studies

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Abstract

Although a CALL room would be great for every class, teachers often have only a CD player or TV/VCR at their disposal. Focusing on video in the Japanese university English classroom, this article first reviews recent research on using video in the foreign language classroom. Then we introduce seven case studies that incorporate videos in a variety of lessons and classroom activities in a wide spectrum of classroom situations. In these studies we demonstrate how versatile videos are by using them in cloze activities; scene dramatization; video dubbing; to introduce a writing or discussion topic; and to introduce and review grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and cultural points. In the conclusion we discuss how to choose a video for classroom use and how to overcome some of the uncontrollable factors such as class attendance and performance anxiety. Overall, we demonstrate that video is an invaluable tool in the ESL/EFL classroom.

Introduction

Over the past 30 years new theories of second language learning and teaching combined with new technologies have produced a variety of classroom practices and standard equipment. Classrooms today may contain not only audio and video equipment, but also computers, expanding the range of possible materials and methods used in teaching. Such technologies often merge with what Nunan¹ calls a “contemporary” approach to second language teaching.

Contemporary theories and practices stress a communicative approach to language teaching: that is, rather than teach language as a system of rules (e.g. grammar), the communicative approach stresses how language is used to express meaning. Language teaching that develops the abilities of students to express meaning becomes task-based and learner-centered. Instead of teacher-centered grammar explanations or the correction of student translations, communicative language activities today use multiple methods to actively involve students with authentic, intrinsically interesting materials.

Developing lessons based on student interests and involving students in the learning process results in a negotiated curriculum that places the responsibility for curriculum development squarely on individual classroom teachers. Adding to this burden is the large body of research on the development of new theories and methods that is published annually. Developing one's own interesting and interactive curriculum based on current research while integrating available technology into lessons presents a formidable challenge to classroom teachers. This article attempts to help teachers simplify curriculum development by focusing on the use of one type of technology — video — in light of recent literature on second-language teaching and learning. After presenting a variety of case studies on classroom video use, we suggest a number of practical strategies geared to teachers of university students in Japan.

Much literature on second language teaching deals with learners of all second languages rather than country or language-specific learning and teaching. Here, however, we focus on a specific population — Japanese university students — for two reasons. First, because of the compulsory English classes that start in the first year of junior high, Japanese university students' are nearly all at an intermediate (or pre-intermediate) English level rather than beginning level. Thus, research on beginning second language students is not always relevant to teaching university students in Japan. Second, as a number of language or country-based publications like the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) attests, there is a need to adapt more universal practices and

principles to local circumstances. Our focus on video rather than more recent computer assisted language learning (CALL) technology is part of this pragmatic emphasis: CALL classrooms in Japanese universities are rarely accessible or available on a regular basis. However, most classrooms do contain at least video, and increasingly, DVD equipment.

Since the early 1990's videos have been part of many foreign and second language programs; indeed, empirical research suggests that they help to build effective programs. Heron et al.² demonstrated that video-based instruction is as effective, if not more effective in some ways, than text-based instruction. Their study compared 28 first-year university students divided into two classes. One class used a textbook with grammar explanations, cultural notes, and exercises. The second used videotapes to introduce a theme via a short drama followed by grammar and cultural explanations. Using speaking, listening, reading and writing tests to assess comprehension, the authors found no statistically significant differences in speaking and reading between text and video-based programs at the end of the academic year. The similar scores on reading tests for the two classes demonstrate that video-based instruction is as effective as text-based instruction in teaching grammar. While the researchers expected higher speaking scores for the video-based instruction group, the lack of any significant difference between classes may have been due to the short duration of the study; one academic year was perhaps not enough time for the expected benefits of video-based instruction to become apparent in speaking ability. Listening scores of the video-based class, however, were significantly higher and surprisingly, so were writing scores. Students in the video-based class not only showed a significant advantage in listening, but also showed a small advantage in writing ability, suggesting a complex interplay between a variety of factors in the development of various language skills.

This study and others strongly support the use of video-based instruction in some form. First, the unexpected finding that writing skills improved confirms the benefits of a multi-sensory approach often found in current theories of instruction. For a number of years learning theory has emphasized

that there are a variety of human learning strategies. Howard Gardner, for example in his seminal work, *Frames of Mind* ³, outlined a theory of multiple intelligences, the idea that people learn in different ways and have different skills and talents that interact or work together during cognitive development. More specifically, Danesi's (reported in DiCarlo⁴) extensive research on brain functions and psycholinguistics supplies further rationale for using visuals and video in the classroom. In short, "students learn best when all of their senses and emotions are engaged."⁵

Second, students in the video-based classroom did better on tests emphasizing the "broad comprehensibility" of language. Students in both classes took two series of tests at the beginning and end of the course, one teacher designed, the other a standardized test. While there were fewer differences between the two classes' performances on the teacher-designed tests, students in the video-based class had even higher scores on the standardized test which was a broader, more comprehensive test, more indicative of general communicative ability.⁶

Third, other empirical studies all show equal or higher performance levels for students in video-based classes. An early study by Secules, Herron, and Tomasello⁷ shows that the listening comprehension of college students enrolled in the second semester of French improved when a video-based program was used. Research on high school students studying Spanish also shows that watching video outside of class improved students listening ability. Two studies of the effect of video versus text-based study on grammar show either improved or equal performance levels. Secules et al find no significant differences between the use of video or text only on grammar. On the other hand, Ramsay⁸ shows that second year college students who used a video-based program outside of class had higher grammar scores than students who used only a text.

Moreover, the effectiveness of video increases with the use of specific teaching techniques, for example, prelistening activities and subtitles. A number of studies show that using prelistening activities (or advance organizers) with videos increases comprehension. A description of the scenes

students will see in the video greatly enhances comprehension compared to viewing with no prior introduction to the material, particularly when paired with related pictures.⁹ The use of prelistening questions is also effective in increasing comprehension. Heron et al¹⁰ compared the effectiveness of using statements to using a variety of both short answer and concrete-point questions as a video prelistening activity. They found that the questions increased student comprehension. The authors speculate that the use of questions may encourage students to participate more actively in viewing the video, leading to better recall and increased understanding.

Allowing students to use subtitles in the target language also improves student performance not only in listening or reading, but also in speaking tasks. Early studies of subtitled video by Price,¹¹ Vanderplank¹² and Garza¹³ (cited in Borrás and Lafayette) show that students improve their comprehension when they watch video with target language subtitles, regardless of the language students are studying or their level. Borrás and Lafayette's¹⁴ study of intermediate learners of French find the use of subtitles also improves speaking performance. Forty-four students in intermediate to advanced level classes completed both lower level and higher level oral communication tasks using an individualized computer program. The tasks required the students to watch either subtitled or unsubtitled video several times, then to describe and narrate the action they had seen. Their verbal answers were then recorded by the computer for detailed analysis of their comprehensibility and accuracy. While answering comprehension questions, then writing and recording their answers students could consult an optional path in the program for vocabulary and grammar hints. The results documented statistically significant benefits to subtitling, with the greatest effects on higher-level tasks. Thus, particularly for intermediate and advanced students who can exercise control over their pace of work, subtitles helped students not only comprehend, but also produce more accurate and comprehensible language.

In this study conducted over the 2006 academic year we experimented with a variety of video-based classroom activities at five different universities

and one accelerated, elite high school where student English levels equaled or exceeded those at the universities. Due to technical constraints — e.g. lack of CALL facilities and even subtitled DVDs — our case studies could not fully explore all the implications of the studies cited above. We could not always use English subtitles and we did not have access to CALL facilities that would permit individualizing the pace of learning for each student. Moreover, class sizes were too small, the level of classes too varied and the composition of classes too different for statistical analysis. We also incorporated teaching techniques that while theoretically less effective, are popular with students. Nunan¹⁵ as well as Harlow and Muyskens¹⁶ show that students and teachers tend to rate teaching techniques quite differently. According to both studies, students tend to rate pronunciation practice highly while teachers rate it as either low or moderately important. In contrast, teachers rank pair work highly while students rank it low in priority. Moreover, these studies sometimes contradict each other. For example, while both students and teachers rated the use of video highly in the study of Harlow and Muyskens, teachers rated video highly, while students rated it quite low, according to Nunan. Therefore, we present a series of case studies which 1) describe the sequence of classroom activities and video used; 2) list characteristics of the classes relevant to success or failure of a particular activity, e.g., size, gender composition, rate of participation; 3) present results of student satisfaction; and 4) provide instructor reflections on the activity. These case studies illustrate not only the popularity of video in the classroom, in nearly all forms, but the importance of the choice of video, post-viewing activities and factors not under teacher control — attendance, required/non-required status of the class, and class composition — in the design of video-based foreign language instruction.

Case Study 1 — *Beauty and the Beast* Video Dubbing Project

Overall rating 9/10

The Class

Class description: English Conversation — a weekly, 90 minute elective for 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year university students

Students: Female 8 / Male 0 (Total of 8 students)

Student English Level: lower intermediate to advanced conversation ability

Length of project: 3 classes (Class 1 — 1 hour / Class 2 — 45 minutes / Class 3 — 10 minutes)

Attendance during the project: full attendance all three classes

Necessary materials: VCR, *Beauty and the Beast* video, video camera, script (provided in appendix 1)

The Beauty and the Beast Project

THE GOALS

The task is to dub the first 5 minutes of Disney's movie *Beauty and the Beast* with students' voices. Through this project students should: 1) become more familiar with the rhythm of English, 2) learn new vocabulary, 3) practice natural intonation and better pronunciation, 4) gain confidence in their English ability and 5) learn the joy of working successfully as the member of a team.

THE SCENE

The scene that is used is one song at the beginning of the movie. The song is sung in turn by the main characters and "extras" so that there are 15 to 20 different parts to divide among the students.

THE PROCEDURE

In class 1, the first step of the project is to view the 5-minute segment of the movie. Step two is to hand out the script (See appendix 1). This is followed by reading through the script with the teacher reading the line first and the students repeating after the teacher. During this time the teacher introduces

words or phrases new to the students. Then the video is played a second time and students follow along with the script. Next, parts are assigned. In this class students actually volunteered for parts and seemed to get the part they wanted.¹

Once parts are assigned, students work through the script again reading their own parts. The teacher goes slowly, correcting intonation and pronunciation, having the entire class repeat correct pronunciation. Students then read through the entire script again before trying it with the video. Some lines are easy and some difficult, so stopping the video to give students several chances to get it right helps them develop confidence. The final scene of the segment is extremely difficult, but not impossible as most of the students first think. To succeed at this section, students must get used to the idea of language overlapping, as several people must speak at once. The odd numbered main lines are practiced until the timing is correct and then the even numbered lines added. The students are exceedingly pleased with themselves (as they should be) when they can finally keep pace with the video. If time permits, they can try the entire video again with a minimum of volume.

Homework is to practice their lines, and, if possible, try it with the video at home.

Class 2 is video taping day. Preparation begins with students reading their parts through the script as the teacher listens carefully for intonation and pronunciation. After they have read the script through, they correct their mistakes and read through the script again with the video at normal volume taking time to go over rough spots until they can get it right twice in a row. Students try the reading again, this time with a minimum of volume — just enough so that they can be sure their timing is right.

The final step is to video the performance. The teacher let students know that the tape would not be stopped the and that small mistakes are inconsequential.

Students just keep the pace and finish the scene as best they can. The video camera records the TV screen so that only the students' voices are heard with the TV volume all but inaudible. Standard analog TV screens will not show a clear picture. The new flat screen TVs, however, can be video taped beautifully.

In class 3 students watched the dubbed version of the video at the end of class and filled out questionnaires (see appendix 2). The students enjoyed their video so much that they watched it twice.

THE RESULTS

The results of the questionnaires showed that all 8 students were very pleased with their progress and with the end product of their own video. They all felt their vocabulary had increased and that their overall English ability had improved. However, only 7 of the 8 students wanted to try a project like this again. The eighth student stated that she was embarrassed to have to sing in front of others.

REFLECTIONS

Overall, this activity with this class was a great success. The students all enjoyed the clip and the class felt much more cohesive after this project. One aspect that might have improved the project would have been to assign some parts. Two students with lower intermediate skills ended up with difficult parts. If they had had simpler parts, they may have gotten even more out of this project.

One prerequisite for success was perhaps the willingness of the teacher to sing in front of the students. The students seemed to do much better when they saw that the teacher too was willing to sing off key to complete the project. In the end, it was well worth the embarrassment.

Case Study 2 — *Beauty and the Beast* Video Dubbing Project

Overall rating 6/10

The Class

Class description: English Expression — a weekly, 90 minute elective for 3rd year university students

Students: Female 14 / Male 7 (Total of 21 students)

Student English Level: lower intermediate to upper intermediate conversation ability

Length of project: 3 classes (Class 1 — 1 hour / Class 2 — 1 hour / Class 3 — 10 minutes)

Attendance during the project: Class 1 — 10 students / Class 2 — 12 students / Class 3 — 19 students (7 students attended both Class 1 and Class 2)

Necessary materials: VCR, *Beauty and the Beast* video, video camera, script (provided in appendix 1)

The Beauty and the Beast Project

The goals, scene and procedure are basically the same as those described in Case Study 1. The differences are described below.

In class 1, attendance was unexpectedly low — only 10 students out of 21, despite normally good attendance with the exception of one or two students.

In contrast to students in Case 1, all the male students, and, indeed, many of the female students were not familiar with the movie. This necessitated seeing the clip several times and providing a verbal synopsis of the movie so that they could understand how the scene they were viewing fit in with the rest of the story.

When it came to casting parts, these students did not volunteer like those in Case Study 1. Roles had to be assigned with the exception of two students: one student who wanted to be the shopkeeper and another who wanted to do all the

sound effects.² Absolutely no one wanted to be Belle, the lead character. The girl with very good English skills who was assigned the part had a voice that was so tentative and quiet that by the recording on the end of the second day four additional students had to sing the part.

Class 2 had 12 students, but surprisingly, only seven who had been there the week before. The students who had missed the week before had to be cast in parts that other students had apparently abandoned. Instead of doing the final polishing before taping the segment, the newcomers had to go over the script slowly first, necessitating an additional 15 minutes preparing this class before the videotaping.

In class 3 students watched the dubbed version of the video at the end of class and filled out questionnaires (see appendix 2). Since there were four students present for the final viewing who knew nothing about the project, the response was decidedly less enthusiastic than that in Case Study 1.

THE RESULTS

The questionnaire results were very mixed. However, those 7 students who attended all three classes enjoyed the activity and wanted to do something like it again. These students also felt their vocabulary had increased and that their overall English ability had improved. However, again the singing got a mixed response.

Students who only attended two of the three classes had very scattered responses. Several of the students asked for more time on a project like this. Indeed, it is necessary to have at least two classes to practice the lines.

REFLECTIONS

The Beauty and the Beast project was not successful in this class. The greatest problem was the poor attendance during the project and the fact that too many

students only attended one of the practice sessions. In retrospect, students need to be told of an upcoming three week project. Given advance notice, the attendance rate, hence student satisfaction and performance, might have been better.

The second problem with this project is the nature of the post-viewing activity—singing. Students' responses to singing are diametrically opposed. They either love it or they hate it. It would be best if scenes performed had both speaking and singing parts, or if students could opt out of singing projects and do a different speaking project. This would take much more preparation and on the teacher's part or CALL facilities enabling different groups to watch and prepare different sections.

Case Study 3 — *Beauty and the Beast* Video Dubbing Project **Overall rating 8/10**

The Class

Class description: English — a weekly, 90-minute compulsory class for 1st year vocational art students

Students: Female 5 / Male 7 (Total of 12 students)

Student English Level: false beginner to intermediate

Length of project: 2 classes (Class 1 — 90 minutes / Class 2 — 60 minutes)

Attendance during the project: Class 1 — 11 students / Class 2 — 10 students
(7 students attended both Class 1 and Class 2)

Necessary materials: VCR, *Beauty and the Beast* video, *Beauty and the Beast* CD, CD player, script (provided in appendix 1)

The *Beauty and the Beast* Project

The goals, scene and procedure are basically the same as those described in Case Study 1. The differences are described below.

In class 1 the students were thrilled to have a video in class but the English was

just too fast for essentially beginning level students. They tried to speak at the pace of the video but it was like teaching them tongue twisters. Also, they were very distracted by the video. They had a great deal of difficulty dealing with both the video and the script.

Like students in Case 2, there were several students in this class who were not familiar with the movie. The unfamiliarity plus the limited ability of the students meant required seeing the clip several times before beginning to work with the script.

Again, when it came to casting parts, students did not volunteer like the students in Case Study 1. The teacher ended up assigning roles. However, to make it more fun for the students, boys were assigned the girls' roles and vice versa. This seemed to allow the students more freedom to enjoy the roles, whereas, if they had been cast in the same gender role, they seem to take the activity more seriously.

Class 2. Given the poor response from the week before, students were given a choice of continuing or dropping the project. Surprisingly, many of the students were excited to continue and had actually practiced. However, to avoid the distraction of the video, a CD of the same song instead seemed to help focus their attention.

Ultimately, the final part of the song with the overlapping voices was just too complicated for this class. Instead students worked only on the main song line.

RESULTS

This class did not get to the point where they were able to dub the video. The students seemed to have had enough of this project by the end of the second class. However, they were very open to trying a project like this again. Thus, the project was a success from the standpoint of stimulating the students' interest in

English, giving them some confidence and allowing them to practice moving their mouths in an “English way”. They definitely gained some sense of satisfaction from this project.

REFLECTIONS

The students in this class actively avoid English whenever possible. However, they were enthusiastic about this project. One reason they may have liked it was because it gave them a chance to speak and more importantly to emote without having to come up with their own vocabulary or grammatical structures. Another may have been because it was a real movie, not a devised scene from a textbook DVD or CD. Working with a popular movie theater movie seemed to make the students feel that their English was closer to the English of native speakers than they had imagined. This project was a great confidence builder, hence successful in that sense.

Case Study 4 — *Home Alone II* Acting Project

Overall rating 7/10

The Class

Class description: English Conversation — a weekly, 90 minute elective for 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year university students (the same class as in case study 1)

Students: Female 8 / Male 0 (Total of 8 students)

Student English Level: lower intermediate to advanced conversation ability

Length of project: 3 classes (Class 1 — 45 minutes / Class 2 — 30 minutes / Class 3 — 10 minutes)

Attendance during the project: full attendance all three classes

Necessary materials: VCR, *Home Alone II* video, video camera, script (Appendix 3)

The *Home Alone II* Project

THE GOALS

In this task students reproduce a scene from *Home Alone II* as the actors. Through this project students should: 1) become more familiar with the rhythm

of English, 2) reinforce learned language patterns, 3) learn new vocabulary, 4) practice natural intonation and better pronunciation, 5) gain confidence in their English ability and 6) learn the joy of working successfully as the member of a team.

THE SCENE

The scene takes place about a half hour into the movie. Kevin arrives alone at the Plaza Hotel in New York City. He asks a man (Donald Trump — whom none of the students know) for directions to the lobby, makes a hotel reservation, checks into the hotel, and is escorted to his room.

THE PROCEDURE

In class 1, the first step of the project is to view the 5-minute segment of the movie. Step two is to hand out the script (See appendix 1). This is followed by reading through the script with the teacher reading the line first and the students repeating after the teacher. During this time new words or phrases are introduced. Then the video is played a second time and students follow along with the script. Next, parts are assigned. Students actually did volunteer, but not for the lead role of Kevin so it was divided into two roles, Kevin on page one of the script and Kevin on page two. This worked well for the students but not for the continuity of the video.

Once parts are assigned, work through the script again having students read their own parts. The teacher goes slowly, correcting intonation and pronunciation, having the entire class repeat correct pronunciation. When finished, students read through the entire script again. Before trying it with actions, students watch the video again, scene by scene, noting the actions in the film. In a group they decide what props and costumes would be good to have and who will bring them.

In class 2, students watch the video again to refresh their memories of how the

scene was really done. They moved into positions and read the scenes as they would be recorded with props. Last, each scene was filmed, allowing two takes. Consequently, It took longer to complete the video than expected.

In class 3 students watched the final version of the scene from the movie at the end of class and filled out questionnaires (see appendix 2). This can be done at the end of class 2 if time permits.

RESULTS

The questionnaire results showed that students were disappointed in the video. They seemed to be hoping for a video that was more professional looking. The teacher's aim was to pull the class together. Neither were satisfied with the results.

REFLECTIONS

Because each scene is done separately with only two or three students in a scene, most of the class was left waiting at the sidelines while a scene was being filmed. Though this only took a few minutes, it broke up the class and, in the end, was not worth it.

Students questionnaires revealed that they were much more pleased with the results of the *Beauty and the Beast* project. This project also gave provided much more group cohesiveness.

This scene from *Home Alone II* is may be useful for developing basic conversation skills because it uses a lot of standard vocabulary and often studied situations (directions and hotel check in), but acting it out was not the best way to use it.

Case Study 5 — *Home Alone II* listening comprehension

Overall Rating: 7/10

The Class

Class description: Communicative English — a weekly, 90 minute required course for 1st year university students

Students: Female 13 / Male 31 (Total of 44 students enrolled of which 29 participated in a follow-up questionnaire)

Student English Level: lower intermediate conversation ability (TOEIC average 365)

Length of project: 2 classes (Class 1 — 20 minutes / Class 2 — 45 minutes)

Attendance during the project: attendance averaged 75% for the two days

Necessary materials: VCR, *Home Alone* video

Home Alone Listening Project

THE GOALS

In this standard listening comprehension task, students are given the opportunity to hear a more authentic version of the type of conversations they are exposed to earlier in the course. The purpose is for students to 1) become familiar with natural conversations rhythms and native pronunciation, 2) learn more extensive related vocabulary and 3) gain confidence in their ability to understand authentic English.

THE SCENE

Home Alone II is a PG-rated movie. Students watch the scene in the video that depicts making a reservation and checking into a hotel. A majority of students were familiar with this particular movie although many forgot the details of the excerpt used in class.

THE PROCEDURE

This activity is part of a month long unit on travel where all of the earlier listening, reading, speaking and writing tasks in the unit focus on this theme.

Prior to this video listening activity, students have already listened to a very short textbook conversation on hotel check-in and practiced a modified version of it in a conversation game.

In class 1 students watch the video three times for general understanding. The first time, they are told only that they will be watching a video clip about making hotel reservations and check-in without knowing the name of the movie. There are no subtitles and they are instructed just to watch and enjoy the scene. The second time, students are directed to look at a few multiple-choice comprehension questions on their handout that gauge general understanding of the main points before watching the video again. After having time to discuss their tentative answers with other students, they watch again for a third time. Small groups then volunteer answers.

In Class 2 students complete a cloze type activity in which they fill in missing words and phrases in a transcript. To refresh student's memory of the scene from the week before and allow students who were absent an introduction to the activity, students view the video once before actually starting the task. After watching the video twice and filling in the blanks with words they hear, students are encouraged to compare their answers before listening a final third time. Groups of students are then assigned to write the words they heard on the board. If they lack confidence in their answers even as a group, they may ask the teacher to repeat the phrase before writing it on the board. By doing this every group is able to put the essentially the correct answer on the board with only minor corrections from the teacher. Before a final viewing, the students practice repeating the intonation of several distinctive phrases and the teacher explains a few colloquial expressions that students are unfamiliar with.

THE RESULTS

After watching the video students filled out questionnaires about this activity. Of the 30 students in class that day, 29 questionnaires were returned. Despite being a very traditional use of video, the majority of students were positive about the activity. A large majority said they would like to do the same type of activity

again (25/29). A majority (22/29) thought the choice of video interesting. Most felt the format was appropriate: the length of the clip was “just right” (17/29), the number of times we watched it appropriate (22/29), and filling in blanks good listening practice (25/28). While none of the students rated the level of English very difficult either for listening or reading, a considerable number felt that as a listening exercise, the video was “difficult” (17/29). Reading the script, only a minority felt it was difficult (9/29) and a slight majority (18/29) felt it was “so-so.” Not being very difficult, a little over half of the students said they did not really learn any new words or expressions. Rather as one student said in the space for comments, the video was useful for learning how fairly “ordinary words are actually used in actual conversation.”

REFLECTIONS

The responses to this activity illustrate the power of video in general for motivating students in language classrooms. While the students learned few new expressions, they gained a feel for the use of language in everyday settings. They also seemed to enjoy developing a sense of rhythm and intonation. When trying to complete the cloze exercise, many students mimicked the intonation of phrases even when they could not identify the actual words. After learning the exact words, many repeated the phrases copying the video intonation over and over to each other playfully.

As research by Nunan has found, exercises like cloze passages which require specific answers are often popular with students rather than global tasks like identifying main ideas or making inferences from material. These results support this idea. Thus while providing a balance of activities is important, use of detailed cloze type passages in languages classrooms does seem to increase motivation, perhaps by giving students tasks that they perceive as manageable.

Case Study 6 – *Everybody Loves Raymond* Activity

Overall Rating 9/10

Class description: Two “four skill” classes taught entirely in English for high school students four hours a week.

Students: group A — female 5/male 9, group B — female 6/male 6

Student English Level: lower intermediate

Length of Project: two 50-minute class sessions

Attendance during the project: group A: 1st class session — no absences, 2nd class session — one absence. Group B: 1st session—one absence, 2nd class session—two absences.

Necessary Materials: Multi-regional DVD player. *Everybody Loves Raymond*, Season 4, “The Can Opener” video and script.

***Everybody Loves Raymond* Project**

THE GOALS: to create awareness of how changes in intonation can convey completely different meanings, to experience a natural speed conversation in English, to enhance listening skills.

THE SCENE: *Everybody Loves Raymond*, Season 4 “The Can Opener”

Husband and wife Raymond and Debra have had an argument on the previous evening. In this scene, the same dialogue is played back from their different points of view to a sympathetic audience. Although the dialogue is the same, variations in the actors’ intonation and timing greatly change the meaning.

THE PROCEDURE

In Class 1 the first step is to briefly introduce the characters and basic situation since this show is unfamiliar to students. In this case, the introduction was done by showing a few minutes of opening scenes from previous episodes which depicted the essential qualities of each character and their situation non-verbally. Students enjoyed the obvious comedy of these scenes.

Next the students watched the segment with a written script and answered simple comprehension check questions. They were encouraged to ask questions about meanings of specific words (e.g., utensil drawer). The students were then asked to repeat the dialogue after the teacher, imitating the intonation and timing as much as possible.

In group A the males took Raymond's part and the females read Debra's part. In group B, students practiced one of the parts with a partner for 5 minutes. Afterwards each pair was given a chance to dub the voices in front of the class. The volume was turned down low, but not off so that the students could tell whether or not they were successful in their timing. Some students used the subtitles, while others used the script.

In Class 2 both classes watched the segment again while stopping the DVD periodically for the teacher to explain phrases and concepts.

THE RESULTS

A survey of students showed mixed levels of satisfaction. During the first class period, group A was bored by repeating the dialogue as a class. Group B, given a slightly different task, enjoyed the challenge of getting the right timing on the dialogues. During the second session, group A was actively involved in listening and comprehending the remainder of the episode. After class, they repeated phrases from it. In contrast, group B was less enthusiastic about the listening part of this activity. They were all surprised to find how simple a dialogue it was to read and yet how difficult it was for them to catch the actors' spoken lines. The students remarked how satisfying working with an authentic text using everyday language was. They also felt that although they could not understand 100% of what was being said, that they were able to catch enough through the actors' expressions and gestures to feel that they understood the gist of the story. Judging from their laughter and comments, it seemed to be a fun, rewarding experience. Both groups said this was the kind of project they wanted to do more often.

REFLECTIONS

Overall this was a successful activity. However, technical problems in operating the equipment and some lack of student understanding detracted from its effectiveness. Having different DVD remote controls in each classroom wasted time as the teacher attempted to go back to previous sections and instead inadvertently jumped back to the beginning of an episode. Students did not seem to fully grasp how the differences in tone were used to create nuanced meanings. However, the experience of negotiating a dialogue at native-speed was an uplifting experience that works well in such small classes. The students were able to practice intonation, tone and timing as well as being pushed to speak at a faster pace. All students indicated this was a fun, confidence-building activity.

Case Study 7 — *Wall Street* drama activity

Overall Rating 7/10

The Class

Class description: Comprehensive English — a weekly, 90-minute required course for 2nd year university students

Students: Female 3 / Male 27 (Total of 34 students enrolled in two classes of which 30, 15 from each class, participated in a follow-up questionnaire)

Student English Level: lower intermediate ability

Length of project: 3 classes (Class 1 — 40 minutes / Class 2 — 40 minutes / Class 3 — 30 minutes)

Attendance during the project: attendance averaged 85% for the three days

Necessary materials: VCR, *Wall Street* video

The Wall Street Project

THE GOALS

In this activity students choose and act out a scene from the movie *Wall Street*. The goals for students are: 1) to become more familiar with the rhythm, intonation and pronunciation of English, 2) to reinforce learned conversation

patterns and 3) to learn new vocabulary in order to gain confidence in their English speaking ability.

THE SCENE

The movie *Wall Street* depicts insider trading in a Wall Street stock brokerage firm in New York in the 1980's. The main character, a young ambitious stock broker, becomes involved in illegal action on behalf of a wealthy corporate raider. Students see a scene about 30 minutes into the movie where the young broker makes the decision to knowingly gather information illegally.

THE PROCEDURE

This activity is the culmination of a six-week unit on corporate ethics. Students have done a number of listening, speaking, and reading activities on technology and ethics and the kinds of ethical problems company employees may encounter. The movie *Wall Street* extends this theme to finance.

In class 1 students receive a brief summary of the movie then watch a 5 minute clip. After watching twice, they try to answer four multiple choice questions about the main points. They discuss the answers with their classmates then view the video a final time before receiving the correct answers to the questions. In the final 10 minutes students are given a full transcript with a Japanese translation and detailed annotations introducing the meaning of vocabulary and colloquial expressions.

In class 2, students begin preparing to act out a portion of the script. They divide themselves in to small groups, choose a section to perform and begin practicing a required number of lines. The teacher circulates to help in choice of lines and pronunciation. When all students have had a chance to practice some, the whole class listens to the video twice again, paying special attention to their chosen lines. There is a short time for further practice and further individualized help.

Class 3 is performance day. After 5 minutes of practice time, each group in turn performs their lines complete with as much action and authentic intonation as students can muster.

THE RESULTS

Students were divided nearly half and half on the usefulness of and interest in this activity. While a small majority said they would like to do a similar activity again (16/29), nearly an equal number did not want to do similar activities in the future (13/29). Moreover, more students preferred cloze type listening comprehension activities with video (17/29) to performing (12/29). One of the main problems seemed to be the stress of public performance. As one student said, "I know that rehearsing my lines was very good English practice, but I didn't like having to perform in front of the class." Likewise, a majority of students were only lukewarm toward the content: a minority found the movie itself "very interesting," (10/29) while a majority rated it "so-so" (18/29). Most students did say they learned many new words and expressions (26/29) and most found the length of the exercise and number of times they viewed it appropriate (16/29 and 19/29). However, the video itself was perceived as slightly difficult. As a listening exercise, 15 of 29 students found it difficult or very difficult. Less than half felt it was only moderately difficult. Even as a reading exercise, 7 students found it difficult, none found it easy and 23 rated it "so-so."

REFLECTIONS

These results show the difficulty of selecting interesting content and finding non-threatening activities beyond just filling in blanks in cloze passages to engage students. A number of factors may have made *Wall Street* less interesting. First the scene chosen was a pivotal point in the movie, but devoid of drama or humor in and of itself, unlike the scene from *Home Alone* which was amusing even without knowing the rest of the movie. Although students knew the basic outline of the plot, it was not enough to stir interest. Moreover, the movie itself was unfamiliar. Unlike *Home Alone*, which most students were familiar with, few had even heard of *Wall Street*. Familiar movies may be most engaging. As one student said on the questionnaire, "I'd like to watch famous movies." In short, movies that students are familiar with may be most motivating.

Conclusion

As one can ascertain from the above case studies, videos are versatile tools. Moreover, these cases introduce just some of the methods for effective video use in the classroom.

- **Cloze activities** — These are popular among students perhaps because of the students' passive tendencies. Exercises can be completed without drawing attention to oneself. These exercises are good for listening exercises and for vocabulary review. Video brings an extra dimension to these often auditory-only exercises.
- **Scene dramatization** — This activity brings much more attention to each individual student. Perhaps for this reason students either love or hate this activity depending on their personality. However, this activity incorporates pronunciation, delivery and body language so that students can use the target language with confidence in a ready-made scenario. One problem is that many students experience stage fright, hence less satisfaction with the activity.
- **Exemplifying a certain grammar or cultural point** — Though a teacher can explain a point adequately to students without video, somehow seeing that point in a professional production brings it more validation. Video also helps to set that point into the correct situational parameters.
- **Dubbing of a scene in students' voices** — Like dramatization, dubbing a video brings attention to students and is either loved or hated depending on their personality. Adding singing to the dubbed activity only seems to intensify the students' reactions. However, if done to speed, dubbing means that student are motivated to keep pace with an actor's actions and lip movements, so that students use the target language at native speed. It also gives students work on pronunciation and intonation. In a choice between dubbing and acting, dubbing allows slightly more anonymity as they can remain seated or "off screen" as you

video tape the movie instead of standing in front of the camera or class.

- **Review of learned vocabulary and sentence patterns** — Using video to review allows students to instantly see how vocabulary and sentences patterns are used and when. By combining pictures, sound, actions and reactions, students are given a total picture of the target language.
- **Scene generated writing or discussion activities** — Video presents a complete picture of a problem within just a few minutes. The teacher can then use the scene presented to set up writing or discussion activities.

Di Carlo¹⁹ points out that by watching authentic scenes that are presented in target language videos, students absorb a functional language while gaining a feeling of accomplishment from deriving meanings from an original source. He goes on to explain that videos give students “messages of interest” and provide “information about cultural conventions made-up of non-verbal language” including gestures, movements of the body, facial expressions and general attitudes.

Ultimately, the use of video in the classroom improves student comprehension. Videos have two major advantages in the classroom: 1) they are an interesting means of introducing lessons that reach students through multiple intelligences, and 2) they offer a means to use real language that students may be familiar with in tandem with pictures, situations, and body language. Moreover, when videos are used in the standard classroom versus a CALL room, it is actually beneficial for the class. By using a video with the class as a group it can improve class dynamics and teamwork. Students have a responsibility to prepare their part and work together to complete tasks successfully. This in turn motivates students to prepare and attend class. Overall, videos may promote a better learning atmosphere.

When choosing a video to use in class, we recommend that clips be either from movies familiar to the students or that the clips illustrate some basic premise for the scene that the instructor will emphasize in a lesson accompanying the video. *Beauty and the Beast* and *Home Alone* are videos that

most students have seen and remember favorably. Ideal videos for use with university students seem to be those that students saw when they were 10-12 years old (8 to 10 years ago), so that they can remember the plot in general, but not the details of the conversations. Students then are pleased to have a video they know and feel fairly comfortable with, but they are interested because they have not seen the movie for a long time so that the conversations hold new details for them to study.

Because of the low student recognition, new video material, such as the clips used in *Wall Street* and *Everybody Loves Raymond*, tend to be perceived by students as work from the beginning instead of a fun trip down memory lane. More background information is needed before the students find them interesting. However, once the background information is given, different clips from the movie or the series can be used again without as much detailed background information about the characters as the first time.

The length of the video clip should be kept to about five minutes. A lot of information is packed into even a short clip and students can become frustrated and lose interest quickly. Also, if you intend to repeat the video clip several times, the shorter clip is easier to work with.

In an ideal world we would be able obtain the videos we want with subtitles and show them in a high-tech classroom. However, this is not the case. It is often difficult to locate the perfect clip. Even knowing exactly which clip to use, obtaining a DVD with English subtitle tracks is sometimes impossible. U.S. DVDs are available but do not work on Japanese DVD players. Japanese DVDs are marketed later and expensive for individual teachers to purchase. The reality is that you need to compromise.

There are also a number of factors outside of the teacher's control which affect learning and teaching. One problem is irregular attendance. To minimize this problem we suggest announcing the video project to the class in advance and informing them of the number of weeks the project will continue. Another problem with some of projects is performance anxiety. Methods to minimize this include: having students chose their own roles, having more than one

student play the same role simultaneously, dividing large roles into smaller segments, or by having men play women's roles and vice versa.

If a picture paints a thousand words then, with it's kinesics, paralanguage, proxemics, chronemics, formal and informal attitudes, cosmetics use, dress styles and character interactions — a video must paint a million. Video is an integral part of today's foreign language classroom and its uses are limited only by the teacher's imagination.

Endnotes

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 - ¹⁶. Harlow, Linda L. and Judith A Muyskens. "Priorities for Intermediate-Level Language Instruction." *The Modern Language Journal*. 78.2 (Summer 1994): 141-154.
 - ¹⁷. If you should try this activity, be forewarned that the part of Lefou is very difficult as the character often starts speaking when he is not on screen, thus giving few visual cues as when he will begin speaking
 - ¹⁸. I ended up adding onomatopoeia for many sounds so this actually was a great idea that I will repeat in the future. Examples include "rip, munch, munch, gulp" when the sheep eats the book, "bang, bang" when Gaston shoots, and "quack, quack" when the ducks fly overhead.
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Appendix I

Belle

[Belle:] Little town
It's a quiet village
Ev'ry day
Like the one before
Little town
Full of little people
Waking up to say:

[Townsfolk:] Bonjour!
Bonjour!
Bonjour! Bonjour! Bonjour!

[Belle:] There goes the baker with his tray, like always
The same old bread and rolls to sell
Ev'ry morning just the same
Since the morning that we came
To this poor provincial town

[Baker:] Good Morning, Belle!

[Belle:] 'Morning, Monsieur.

[Baker:] Where are you off to?

[Belle:] The bookshop. I just finished the most wonderful story
about a beanstalk and an ogre and a -

[Baker:] That's nice. (Marie! The baguettes! Hurry up!)

[Townsfolk:] Look there she goes that girl is strange, no question
Dazed and distracted, can't you tell?
Never part of any crowd
'Cause her head's up on some cloud

No denying she's a funny girl that Belle

[Man I:] Bonjour

[Woman I:] Good day

[Man I:] How is your fam'ly?

[Woman II:] Bonjour

[Man II:] Good day

[Woman II:] How is your wife?

[Woman III:] I need six eggs

[Man III:] That's too expensive

[Belle:] There must be more than this provincial life

[Bookseller:] Ah, Belle.

[Belle:] Good Morning. I've come to return the book I borrowed.

[Bookseller:] Finished already?

[Belle:] Oh, I couldn't put it down. Have you got anything new?

[Bookseller:] Ha Ha! Not since yesterday.

[Belle:] That's all right. I'll borrow this one!

[Bookseller:] That one? But you've read it twice!

[Belle:] Well, it's my favorite! Far off places, daring swordfights,
 magic spells, a prince in disguise -

[Bookseller:] If you like it all that much, it's yours!

[Belle:] But sir!

[Bookseller:] I insist.

[Belle:] Well, thank you. Thank you very much!

[Townsfolk:] Look there she goes that girl is so peculiar
 I wonder if she's feeling well

With a dreamy far-off look
And her nose stuck in a book
What a puzzle to the rest of us is Belle

[Belle:] Oh, isn't this amazing?
It's my fav'rite part because you'll see
Here's where she meets Prince Charming
But she won't discover that it's him 'til chapter three

[Woman:] Now it's no wonder that her name means "beauty"
Her looks have got no parallel

[Shopkeeper:] But behind that fair facade
I'm afraid she's rather odd
Very different from the rest of us

[Townsfolk:] She's nothing like the rest of us
Yes, different from the rest of us is Belle

[LeFou:] Wow! You didn't miss a shot, Gaston! You're the greatest
hunter in the whole world!

[Gaston:] I know.

[LeFou:] No beast alive stands a chance against you. Ha ha ha! And
no girl, for that matter.

[Gaston:] It's true, LeFou. And I've got my sights set on that one.

[LeFou:] Hm! The inventor's daughter?

[Gaston:] She's the one - the lucky girl I'm going to marry.

[LeFou:] But she's -

[Gaston:] The most beautiful girl in town.

[LeFou:] I know, but -

[Gaston:] That makes her the best. And don't I deserve the best?

[LeFou:] Well, of course! I mean you do, but -

[Gaston:] Right from the moment when I met her, saw her
 I said she's gorgeous and I fell
 Here in town there's only she
 Who is beautiful as me
 So I'm making plans to woo and marry Belle

[Bimbettes:] Look there he goes
 Isn't he dreamy?
 Monsieur Gaston
 Oh he's so cute
 Be still my heart
 I'm hardly breathing
 He's such a tall, dark, strong and handsome brute

[Man I:] Bonjour!
[Gaston:] Pardon
[Man II:] Good day
[Man III:] Mais oui!
[Matron:] You call this bacon?
[Woman I:] What lovely grapes!
[Man IV:] Some cheese
[Woman II:] Ten yards
[Man IV:] one pound
[Gaston:] 'scuse me!
[Cheese merchant:] I'll get the knife
[Gaston:] Please let me through!
[Woman I:] This bread -
[Man V:] Those fish -
[Woman I:] it's stale!
[Man V:] they smell!
[Baker:] Madame's mistaken.

[Belle:] There must be more than this provincial life!
[Gaston:] Just watch, I'm going to make Belle my wife!

[Townfolk:] Look there she goes a girl who's strange but special
 A most peculiar mad'moiselle
 It's a pity and a sin
 She doesn't quite fit in
 'Cause she really is a funny girl
 A beauty but a funny girl
 She really is a funny girl
 That Belle

Appendix II: Home Alone 2

Kevin: Excuse me, where's the lobby?

Man: Down the hall and to the left.

Kevin: Thanks.

Kevin: Wow!

Tape: Guests of the new celebrity Ding-Dang-Dong stay at the world-renowned Plaza Hotel, New York's most exciting hotel experience. For reservations call toll free 1-800-759-3000.

Kevin: I'll do just that!

Kevin: (taping his voice) Howdy-do. This is Peter McCallister, the father. I'd like a hotel room, please, with an extra large bed, a TV, and one of those little refrigerators you have to open with a key. Credit card? You got it.

Reservations Clerk: Plaza Hotel reservations. May I help you?

Tape: Howdy-do. This is Peter McCallister, the father.

Reservations Clerk: Yes, sir.

Tape: I'd like a hotel room, please.

Reservations Clerk: Yes.

Tape: With an extra large bed, a TV, and one of those little refrigerators you have to open with a key.

Reservations Clerk: Yes, Sir. You'll need a major credit card upon check in.

Tape: Credit card? You got it.

Reservations Clerk: Thank you! Enjoy your stay.

Concierge: Yes, two at eight, Henri. Mr. Yamamoto. Hold on a second. I'll call you back, Henri.

Kevin: Hi.

Desk clerk: Can I help you?

Kevin: Reservation for McCallister.

Desk clerk: A reservation for yourself?

Kevin: Ma'am, my feet are hardly touching the ground. I'm barely able to look over this counter. How can I make a reservation for a hotel room? Think about it: a kid, going into a hotel, making a reservation? I don't think so.

Desk clerk: I'm confused.

Kevin: I'm traveling with my Dad. He's on business. He's at a meeting. I hate meetings. Plus I'm not allowed to go in. I can only sit in the lobby. That's boring. So, my dad dropped me off here. He gave me his credit card and said to look for whoever is checking people in to let me into the hotel room so I won't get into mischief. And, ma'am, sometimes I do get into mischief. We all do!

Police Officer: (on phone) Merry Christmas. (to Kevin's father) No sign of 'im. Uh, we're going to have to be able to get a hold of you. Do you have hotel arrangements?

Kevin's dad: Yeah.

Police Officer: Do you have a, uh, recent photo of the boy?

Kevin's dad: I have one in my wallet. I don't have my wallet. My wallet is in my bag. Kevin was looking in my bag at the airport. He was looking for batteries. Kevin has my wallet!

Police Officer: Did you have credit cards in your wallet?

Kevin's dad: Credit cards, money....

Police Officer: We'll notify the credit card companies immediately. If your son has the cards we can get a location on him when and if he uses them.

Kevin's mom: No, I don't think Kevin even knows how to use a credit card.

Kevin: (Whispers to self) Wow, it worked!

Concierge: Cedric.

Cedric: Yes.

Concierge Don't count your tips in public. And find out everything you can about that ...young fellow.

Desk clerk: (to Cedric) Front, please. (to Kevin) Enjoy your stay with us, and don't forget to remind your dad when he arrives that he has to come down and sign a couple of things.

Kevin: Thank you! You've been most helpful.

Cedric: May I take your bags, sir?

Cedric: Up here to your left. You know, Herbert Hoover once stayed here on this floor.

Kevin: The vacuum guy?

Cedric: No, the president. (Opens door) This is one of our finest suites, sir.

Kevin: (Whispers to self) This is great. Wow! A huge bed just for me. (Speaks to self) Luxurious and spacious. How convenient! (To Cedric) Hey!

Cedric: Did you want me to put the key in the bag? Or did you just want to hang on to it?

Kevin: I'll hang on to it.

Cedric: Is everything all right, sir? Is the temperature in the room okay?

Kevin: It's okay.

Cedric: Do you know how the T.V. works?

Kevin: I'm 10 years old. T.V.'s my life.

Cedric: Well.... (hinting that he wants a tip)

Kevin: Oh, I'm sorry.... And there's plenty more where that came from.

Appendix III : Everyone Loves Raymond, "The Can Opener"

Ray's Version

Kids: Hi Daddy!

Ray: Hey everybody!

Debra: Huh

Kiss (Raymond looks lovingly into Debra's eyes.)

R: How was your day?

Debra: Everything's fine.

R: Great. What's for dinner?

D: I haven't made you anything yet. Can you wait?

R: Fine. I'll make my own dinner. (Whistling.) Mmmm. Tunafish. Where's that can opener?

D: It's in the drawer.

R: What?

D: The can opener is in the utensil drawer.

R: Righty-o!

D: I bought a new one.

R: Ah ha! Oh, did we need a new can opener?

D: It's better, ok? It cuts from the side so there's no sharp edges.

R: How does this thing work?

D: You put it on the can. You twist the thing. You open the can.

R: Great, a better can opener. (laughs)

D: What's so funny?

R: Oh (spills tuna) Would you look at this!

D: Use a fork.

R: Was there something wrong with the other can opener?

D: There's nothing wrong with THIS can opener.

R: (laughs) No, nothing's wrong, honey. I would have preferred the tuna on bread but it's just as delicious right out of the sink! Ha! (laughs)

D: This is the can opener I bought, ok, Ray, because it's better. It's not stupid! And I'M not stupid!

R: What'd I say?

R: And I'm not exaggerating.

Debra's Version

D: It's just sometimes he's such a jerk.

Robert: Given. Details.

D: The kids are a mess. I'm trying to hold everything together. He comes home. Oldest daughter: I'm gonna run away.

D: No, don't run away. Mommy would miss you. C'mon sit. Let's eat.

R: Yeah.

D: Oh! Daddy's home.

R: How was your day? (Doesn't wait for answer.) Great. What's for dinner?

D: Oh gosh! Well, actually I haven't had time to make anything. If you could just wait...

R: Fine. I'll make my own dinner...again. Mmm...tunafish. Son of a ...where's the can opener?

D: Umm. It's in the drawer.

R: What?

D: The can opener is in the utensil drawer.

R: Right.

D: Here. See? I bought a new one.

R: Did we need a new can opener?

D: It's better. It cuts the can from the side so there's no sharp edges.

R: How does this thing work?

D: Look. See? You just put it on the can. You twist the thing and it opens the can.

R: Great. A better can opener. Ha ha ha.

D: What's so funny?

R: Nothing. Oh, great. Would you look at this! Oh my God, tuna juice! Oh my God!

D: Here Sweetie, use a fork.

R: Was there something wrong with the old can opener?

D: There's nothing wrong with THIS can opener!

R: Oh no! Nothing's wrong honey. I would have preferred the tuna on bread but it's just as delicious right out of the sink.

D: No, Ray. This is the can opener I bought because it was better. I mean, it's not stupid and I'm not stupid.

R: What'd I say?

Robert: That bastard.