

The magic of the moving image

Sara Hannam uses authentic video in the language classroom.

The curtains are drawn and the classroom is in darkness. Twenty pairs of captivated eyes and ears are fixed on a dynamic medium of movement and sound. Is this an ideal language learning tool or mere entertainment? What role can authentic video play in language learning and acquisition?

Using authentic video has become an essential component of my classroom practice in recent years and has significantly enhanced the learning experience of my students. It brings a fresh perspective to the lesson that students never seem to tire of. This dynamism derives precisely from the fact that it is authentic, and therefore contains so many elements of the real language that are missing from commercially produced ELT videos and coursebooks.

What is authentic video?

Authentic video is any complete audio-visual text in the medium of English, or an excerpt from that text. To be authentic, it must have been designed for viewing by an English-speaking audience (not necessarily native speakers) for the purposes of entertainment or education. Examples include:

Films • Documentaries • News • Current affairs • Soaps • Adverts • Music videos • Interviews • Cartoons • The weather • Children's TV • Screen plays

Note: see page 63 for details of copyright laws governing the recording and use of audio-visual resources in the UK.

Why use authentic video?

It is often argued that natural and ungraded language may enhance the acquisition process and is a necessary part of language learning: such undistorted language is plentiful in authentic TV and film. Argyle suggests that it is estimated that to understand and participate in communication, non-verbal clues (which may account for as much as 80% or more of conversational interaction), including voice tone and body language, must also be de-coded. These non-verbal messages are present in the audio-visual image. The language of TV and film also reflects the changes and evolution that the English language experiences on a day-to-day basis, and which is hard to transport into the classroom, particularly in terms of idiomatic and regional usage. As Allan points out, 'video is a good way of bringing slices of living language into the classroom'.

Barriers to using authentic video

Language teachers may not feel predisposed to using authentic (and indeed commercially-produced) video. These are some of the reasons I have come across when facilitating teacher training sessions, along with possible solutions to problems encountered.

'The learning environment of my educational institution is not compatible with video use. It is viewed as an "easy option" which encourages passive viewing.'

This idea is turned on its head when we design interactive tasks to accompany the video. Learners become active viewers who are put in the position of native speakers and must struggle to understand both meaning and context, using all available linguistic resources. Teachers can also be selective in terms of the quality of material used.

'How will video fit into an already rigid timetable?'

Video can be used as a warmer, filler or final activity. A short scene from a film can run for less than five minutes and could be used as little as once a month.

'Will I lose control of the class?'

This is a legitimate fear for any teacher. My experience suggests the opposite, as when TV and video go on it seems to have a calming effect, particularly with teenagers and younger learners.

'Will my students be bored?'

Students see it as a welcome break from the taxing, often exam-oriented modern classroom. This resource mirrors an enjoyable activity in learners' everyday lives in which TV is held in very high esteem.

'My school doesn't have a video.'

If possible, try to convince other language teachers of the value of authentic video and then collectively ask the Director of Studies or Head to invest in one. You can use the points below as a rationale.

How does authentic video enhance teaching and learning?

There are countless linguistic benefits that can be used as valid justification for having this resource available.

Authentic video:

- provides visual context/support for new language containing important non-verbal features of communication.
- provides valuable authentic listening practice and exposure to a range of accents.
- stimulates lexical enrichment, particularly idiomatic.
- promotes oral communication and student-centred discussion.
- allows the teacher to design tasks which are tailor-made to the students' needs and interests – an exam focus can also be built into activities if necessary.
- gives students a valuable insight into the diversity of the target language culture and provides a space for critical consideration of that culture.
- can be used to focus on new language or elicit pre-existing knowledge of specific structures/lexis.
- can be used as a main activity or as a supplement.
- can be used for information gathering and as a springboard to writing or speaking practice.

Where can I find authentic video?

I work in Greece where all non-Greek programmes are subtitled, so I tend to use a combination of films and cartoons in English which I rent from the video shop, documentaries (shown on Greek TV with subtitles) and boxed sets or individual videos, which I order from the UK, including soap operas or children's TV. Excerpts from EuroNews, which is transmitted in English once a day, are also very useable. Remember to check the local copyright laws before using excerpts or complete authentic texts as these vary from country to country.

What do I choose?

The choice of material and activity must be carefully considered by the teacher and adjusted according to the needs of each group. I have selected several activities at an upper-intermediate/advanced level to illustrate some possible uses of authentic resources. One is given on page 64 and the others will appear in Issue 32 of ETp.

A final word ...

The point behind using authentic video in the classroom is to teach (not test) and to expose students to real and ungraded language. Video-based activities can help to make language learning a stimulating, thought-provoking and fully engaging task, as well as allowing space for critical discussion. Furthermore, authentic video enables the teacher to provide some positive reinforcement of communicative ability and to enhance student confidence through the familiar medium of the audio-visual image. As every teacher knows, a confident student learns more effectively. **ETp**

Argyle, M 'The communication of superior attitudes by verbal and non-verbal signals' *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 9 (3) 1970

Allan, M *Teaching English with Video* Longman 1985



Sara Hannam is the Director of the English Unit at City Liberal Studies in Thessaloniki, Greece. She is also a sessional teacher trainer at Aristotle State University of Thessaloniki and a Cambridge Oral Examiner for Northern Greece.

hannam@city.academic.gr

Audio-visual copyright

This information relates to recording and screening in the UK. For countries outside the UK, contact local channels to check on copyright status.

Film:

Films or extracts of films can be used freely for educational purposes providing that it is within a classroom setting and not a public screening or another public setting such as a student extra-curricula club.

Source: Film Bank UK (distributors)
~ Tel: +44 207 984 5950

Television broadcasts (institutional):

To have the right to record TV productions for educational purposes within the UK, each institution can register for a license from the Educational Recording Agency (ERA) website: www.era.org.uk.

Source: ERA

Tel: +44 207 837 3222

Television broadcasts (individual teachers):

The best place to start is with the individual channels to ask permission to screen extracts for educational purposes. They may refer you to programme makers.

BBC: Tel ~ +44 20 8743 8000

Channel 4: Tel ~ +44 20 7396 4444

Channel 5: Tel ~ +44 20 7550 5555

ITV: Tel ~ +44 20 7843 8000

Cable and satellite broadcasts:

As there is at present no licensing scheme to cover these broadcasts, each establishment may therefore record them under the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

Source: as above (ERA)

Adverts:

All channels are reluctant to grant permission to use adverts for educational purposes. However, the compilation 'Adfab: the classic compilation of great British TV adverts', published by Warner Music UK 1996, contains some excellent adverts and can be used for educational purposes.

Source: Warner Vision UK

Tel: +44 207 467 2566