

Reviews

Comptes rendus

THREE BOOKS ON THE USE OF VIDEO IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

VIDEO, TV AND RADIO IN THE ENGLISH CLASS

Barry Tomalin, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1986. 118 pages.

VIDEO IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Jack Lonergan, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. 133 pages.

VIDEO APPLICATIONS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

John McGovern (Ed.), Oxford: Pergamon Press and the British Council, 1983. 109 pages.

“Emphatically video is not a method.” (Barry Tomalin)

“It is the teacher who must harness the power of video films.” (Jack Lonergan)

“Video raises in a particularly strong form one of the major socially created difficulties for teachers in general and language teachers in particular.

“. . . This is a question of copyright.” (C. J. Brumfit)

These quotations could have been made by any one of the three authors. They reflect three common issues that all three feel should be addressed before embarking on a discussion of video techniques in the classroom. The issues are methodology, the role of the teacher, and copyright laws.

To say that video is not a methodology in itself seems to be stating the

obvious. Yet the authors warn against equating video with method. They remember when language laboratories first appeared and how the technology tended to dictate the method, which at that time consisted of extensive drilling and manipulation of structures. They contend that when methodology went out of favour, so did the use of the language lab. It has taken teachers many years to develop a humanistic use of that technology, such that it fosters more communicative skills and preserves the student-teacher relationship. They are adamant that this should not happen with video. They also warn against planning "video lessons", meaning that the use of video in a lesson could become the objective, instead of being merely an aid to achieving that objective.

In keeping with the notion that video use in language teaching is new and not fully explored, comes concern for the role of the teacher. The authors believe that the teacher's role is vital for learning to take place. They refute the idea that video should ever replace a teacher in a language classroom. They cite examples of how video can make students passive and bored if it is not controlled by the teacher, who would use it as a tool in conjunction with existing methods.

Copyright is the third issue that must be addressed in relation to video use. As many teachers have already experienced, copyright laws can severely limit the choice of material that can be used in the classroom. In most countries, including Canada, these limitations extend to preventing the recording of TV shows, except for daily news programs, and to prohibiting the classroom use of excerpts from commercially made motion pictures. The result is that teachers only have access to commercially made educational material, which can be very expensive and seldom completely suitable. Because of these limitations, the authors find it necessary to discuss the different approaches to video use, sometimes comparing educationally prepared material versus "off-air" recordings. However, it is not surprising that their discussions focus more on the use of commercially prepared language video tapes, than on the other, if only because the present copyright laws make the other route less worthwhile to pursue. Brumfit in the preface to *Video Applications*, says that for most people the choice is between "pirating" or having no contact at all with certain ideas or creative materials. Brumfit believes that there are sound educational reasons as to why copyright restrictions should be removed if the material is being used for educational purposes, and urges that a lobby be formed to work on changing the laws. Perhaps TESL Canada has such a role to play on the Canadian front!

Video, TV and Radio in the English Class is the most basic of the three books. Like *Video in Language Teaching*, it is a practical handbook for teachers who want to learn about or expand their knowledge of video

techniques in a step-by-step manner. *Video Applications in English Language Teaching*, on the other hand, is a collection of detailed studies on special issues pertaining to video, both practical and philosophical.

Video, TV and Radio is most suited for teachers with little or no experience in video. Tomalin does not assume that the reader already knows the basic tenets of video use. Whenever necessary, he states a tenet clearly and explains why it is so. An example of this is in section 2.2, devoted to how much video should be used in a lesson. Tomalin states that five minutes or less, is sufficient for an hour's teaching. While this may be surprising to novice video users, Lonerger takes this fact for granted in *Video in Language Teaching*. However, Lonerger gives a far more thorough coverage of video use and his book is more suited to teachers with some background in video use, or at least with no fear of the technology!

Both *Video, TV and Radio in the English Class* and *Video in Language Teaching*, are very well organized. The contents of the books are accessible to readers because of the aptly named chapters and the use of comprehensive subtitles throughout the texts. In *Video, TV and Radio*, the sub-titles also appear in the contents, so any given section may be referred to immediately. As well as this accessibility, both books contain extensive bibliographies of all the video materials cited, giving information on the publisher and a brief note describing its possible use. Tomalin also includes a list of organizations in Britain that produce video material, with addresses so teachers can write for more information or to obtain tapes.

Both books also give information on how to choose video equipment and software, as well as explanations with diagrams on how to set it all up. As to be expected, Lonerger goes further than Tomalin on technical matters by including two excellent chapters on the use of the video camera. As well as offering good pedagogical ideas for the use of a video camera, Lonerger provides the inexperienced teacher with invaluable tips on such technicalities as the effects of good or poor composition and how best to arrange people and microphones in different settings.

As his book-title suggests, Tomalin compares the three media: video, TV and radio, and explores ways to use all three in the classroom. Lonerger is almost solely concerned with video, but includes a chapter on the use of "off-air" recordings of TV broadcasts. He does caution teachers, however, to be sure and find out what the copyright restrictions are in their area of the world.

As practical handbooks on video use, both *Video, TV and Radio* and *Video in Language Teaching* lead the reader through a progression of techniques. The authors are in agreement that the learning process

involves three steps: preparation for viewing, actively viewing, and then the transfer of new language (using both verbal and non-verbal) to the students, often in the form of role-plays. To achieve completion of this process, the authors describe a great variety of practical activities in which video may be used. While both authors cover similar ground, Lonergan provides a much richer and thorough coverage of the different uses of video for language teaching.

Video Applications in English Language Teaching contains eight papers which discuss in detail specialized aspects of video use. This book would be of greatest interest to teachers who have used video extensively, and who may wish to go further in their own research on the subject. The studies range from practical descriptions to more theoretical and philosophical considerations. The authors are all experienced teachers, both at home and in countries outside Britain. Each of their papers is a result of research done in relation to their work experiences. Thus some are quite descriptive, such as John McGovern's paper on types of soft-ware he has used, and Frances MacKnight's thorough survey of video use in British language institutes. Other papers deal with an underlying philosophy or rationale that may be needed for good use of video in language teaching. Such an example would be the papers by Dave and Jane Willis, who between them examine the potential of video by attempting to classify its uses, by exploring exhaustively the role of the visual element, and by setting up a progressive set of language learning objectives and showing how specifically each objective could be reflected in a particular use of a video sequence.

Jack Lonergan also has a paper included in this book. In it he has referred in brief to some of the techniques he describes in *Video and Language Teaching*, such as the use of a viewing guide. However his main focus is in relation to television. He discusses language programmes as television programmes and the liaison between broadcasting networks and educational institutions.

Margaret Allen's paper describes the uses of video recording in an institution. She talks about the main uses: in teacher training or in direct teaching. She considers the value of recording teacher and student performance and the recording of events or "slices of life" for use as teaching aids in both situations. She is also concerned with the production of video material by teachers. Here she gives some sound practical advice, including a Production Checklist, which will probably save many an inexperienced video user from the frustration of production by trial and error.

Chris Kennedy's paper, "Video in English for Specific Purposes", shows some of the especially communicative uses of video. He finds that video is particularly useful in developing study skills, such as note-taking,

listening to lectures and to participating in seminars. As with many of the authors, he first discusses the nature of video and how its socio-psycholinguistic elements make it particularly suitable for developing communicative competence in the learner, which is the underlying concern of ESP work.

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READ CANADA! (INTERMEDIATE and INTERMEDIATE PLUS)

Michael Sutton and Chris Jones, Ottawa: Public Service Commission of Canada, Language Training Program Branch, 1984 and 1985.

Read Canada! (Intermediate and Intermediate Plus) is a welcome and much-needed addition to adult ESL materials in Canada. Each volume is based on a skills approach to reading which "encourages students to get away from inefficient word-for-word reading and to employ a reading skill appropriate to the purpose for which they are reading" (p. 1, both volumes). To facilitate this approach, the exercises at both levels provide opportunities for the practice of skills in skimming, scanning, and reading for basic comprehension, with two more advanced skills (reading for thorough comprehension; critical reading or reading for a point of view) added in *Intermediate Plus*.

The wide variety of reading content, all Canadian, is certain to meet the wide range of interests that students have. If one unit does not particularly appeal to a student, another unit will, and within each unit the variety of questions provides interesting assignments even for topics that some students feel are not stimulating. Some of the units which I find particularly interesting are "Canadian Inventions," "Fiddleheads," "The Oak Island Treasure," and "Kidnapped by a Sasquatch" from *Intermediate*; and "The Mad Trapper of Rat River," "Maple Syrup," "Immigration (two units)," "The National Capital Region (two units)," and "The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation" from *Intermediate Plus*. I did not expect to find "Canada's Natural Resources" much fun, but the text is actually quite interesting, and the authors have taken the resources idea nicely into the assignment suggestions. I particularly like the debate about which of four desert islands, each with one major natural resource, would be the most preferable to be shipwrecked on.

Each set of text materials in the series is accompanied by photographs, diagrams, charts, line drawings, newspaper clippings, and/or other non-text items. These additional items are not included to fill in blank space; in fact, they sometimes give a feeling of clutter to some pages, a feeling that there is just too much on the page. However, this is simply a layout problem, because there are very few items or pictures which do not have a specific purpose. Students have to comprehend all the material, not just the text, in order to proceed with the exercises. For this reason, *Read Canada!* stands as a fine example of complete integration between text and illustrative material for reading. The use of black and white rather than colour heightens the sense that the non-text material is integral rather than decorative.

The introduction to each volume briefly describes how to use the lessons, pointing out the flexibility of the program to meet individual classroom needs. It also provides an overview of each type of skill question and activity included. The final section of each book is an answer key to every unit.

Turning to the exercises themselves, we find a wide range of activities which encourage students to read and write with a number of different purposes. The short-answer questions are very well structured, comprehensive enough to stand alone, but leave room for the teacher's further exploitation of the text to suit particular student needs. The discussion questions and the suggestions for writing are equally excellent, encouraging students to start with what they have read and think beyond that text to different situations.

My major criticism of the exercises is that, despite commendable restraint, the authors have still included role-playing in the assignments. Role-playing can have a legitimate place in learning activities, but that place is seldom in ESL reading, despite the great popularity of the practice. First, the purpose of exercises in a language class is surely to practise language; the purpose of role-playing, with its roots in dramatic arts and social psychology, is to explore different characters and situations in order to understand other points of view. The problem arises when exercise makers in language textbooks try to add action to activities by getting students to role-play in pairs, where one "actor" is given the role of a highly proficient English speaker. The *Read Canada!* authors have been relatively careful in the kind of roles they have suggested, but a few items are a bit ludicrous as exercises for *learners* of English. For instance, one provides

four biographies of men who grew up together in an English port city. About 1840 they separated and went to different part of the British Empire. The role-play is a reunion 40 years later in a pub in their home city. (p. 39, *Intermediate Plus*)

If authors must include role-playing, then they ought to use more judgment about the topic and the roles. This particular exercise is part of a unit on the settlement of Canada, so the variety of roles possible is immense. Why make students pretend to be English?

In the next unit in the same book, there is an exercise section called "Interactive Activities" in which small groups are to make up a list of questions that an immigration officer should ask and also to create a biography of a potential immigrant. Then the groups are rearranged and pairs of students "conduct an immigration interview". This last instruction looks very much like role-play. The strength in the exercise, however, is in the preparation of the questions and the biography. While students are working together, they will be engaging in purposive language. They really do not need to role-play afterwards

There is also a wealth of suggestions for interviews, debates, and discussions, which follow from and further extend the text of the unit. For example, in *Intermediate Plus*, in the unit "The National Capital Region, Part 1", one question for discussion is

One reason for choosing Ottawa as the capital was its location at a safe distance from the U.S. border. If Quebec separated from the rest of Canada, could Ottawa remain the capital? If not, where should the new capital be?

This exercise allows students to exchange ideas with their colleagues in a setting which forces them to listen, respond, and present new points of view. They can concentrate on what they want to say and not have to worry about playing a role. The discussion questions, like almost all the other types of extending questions in this series, provide a number of possible activities, ensuring that most students will find at least one exercise of interest, even if the topic seems less interesting to some students than to others.

The overall design of the books, with the exception of the sometimes crowded look of some pages, is very pleasing, as is the cover design with its maple leaf and photograph of a different major Canadian library for each book. What has been published to date is the two intermediate levels of what appears to be a longer series. It is very much to be hoped that beginner and senior levels of *Read Canada!* are in production. The high quality of this short series demands that the other books reach the market soon.

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