

## The Effects of Using Advance Organizers and Captions to Introduce Video in the Foreign Language Classroom

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*Foreign language teachers and students now have access to more video materials than ever before. This article explored two video instructional strategies, advance organizers and captions in the target language, to make the viewing experience profitable. After reviewing the relative effectiveness of various types of advance organizer and the advantages and disadvantages of using captioned video materials, a set of classroom procedures that combines advance organizers and captions to teach English as a foreign language is proposed.*

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### Introduction

As increasing numbers of foreign language (FL) teaching programs begin to integrate video materials into their curricula, more attention is being focused on how to make the viewing experience profitable. This article reports on the procedures for combining two video instructional strategies for preparing students to view a video, namely advance organizers and captions in the target language.

What follows is, first, a description of the relative effectiveness of various types of advance organizers, then a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of using captioned video materials, followed by a suggested set of classroom procedures for taking advantage of both advance organizers and captions to teach English as a foreign language (EFL).

### Background

The use of advance organizers was first advocated by Ausubel (1961) who suggested that the retention of unfamiliar but meaningful material could be enhanced by the advance introduction of relevant concepts. Findings from empirical studies in foreign language acquisition have supported the use of advance organizers prior to listening to texts to enhance listening comprehension (Mueller, 1980).

The National Captioning Institute (NCI) began the first television transmission of closed-captioned programming in the United States in 1980. American education and literacy specialists quickly recognized the potential

of exploiting captioned television in the teaching of English language skills to a variety of learners. In 1983 Price conducted a pilot project to determine if foreign students of English as a second language (ESL) might benefit from closed-captioned television and video programming in their study of the language. The study concluded that captioned video materials might help facilitate the learning of ESL not only by improving global comprehension of the language of the test material, but also by helping the learner to “acquire more of the cultural script” (p. 8) that native speakers of English share.

### *Relative Effectiveness of Advance Organizers*

The list of effective advance organizers includes pictures, videos, verbal descriptions, key vocabulary, short sentences on the board, prequestioning techniques, and cultural background cues. In Herron’s (1994) study, the teacher provided students with several short sentences written on the board in the target language that summarized in chronological order major scenes in an upcoming video segment. The results of this study suggest that students’ comprehension of a foreign language video can be enhanced by providing an advance organizer in the form of a short written summary of principal scenes in the video.

In 1995 Herron, Hanley, and Cole conducted a comparative experiment with two kinds of advance organizers. In the *Description only* advance organizer scenario, the teacher read aloud six sentences that summarized major scenes in the upcoming video. In the *Description + Pictures* advance organizer scenario, the teacher presented the identical six-sentence description of major scenes in the video and also showed a related picture in context with the sentences. Results indicated that the visual support significantly improved comprehension of the videos.

### *Some Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Captioned Video Materials*

It is traditionally held that the use of target language captions in language teaching is a source of distraction and slows the development of learners’ listening ability. Some researchers say that it creates a form of text dependency and leads to laziness because learners rely on the text rather than the stream of speech. However, according to Vanderplank’s report (1988), subtitles (similar to captions) have potential value in helping the language acquisition process by providing learners with the key to massive quantities of authentic language input that are potentially incomprehensible. He argued that subtitles might help to develop language proficiency through enabling learners to be conscious of new and unfamiliar language that might otherwise simply be lost in the stream of speech.

Garza (1991) conducted a comparative study using Russian and English as target languages to evaluate the use of captioning, on-screen target lan-

guage subtitles, as a pedagogical aid to facilitate the use of authentic video materials in the foreign language classroom. In this study, participants in the Russian and English classes were randomly divided into two groups so that one saw the test segments with subtitles, and the other saw the control segments without subtitles. The results strongly support a positive correlation between the presence of captions and increased comprehension of the linguistic content of the video material, suggesting that the use of captions helps to bridge the gap between the learners' competence in reading and listening.

Borras and Lafayette (1994) investigated the effects of subtitling for increasing learners' oral communicative performance of fifth-semester college students of French. As used in their study, the term *subtitling* refers to whether the participants can see and control via interactive videodisc a video segment with or without fully duplicating (literal) subtitles in the target language. Their investigation verified that fully duplicating subtitles in the target language had potential value in helping learners not only comprehend authentic linguistic input better, but also produce comprehensible communicative output.

## Classroom Procedures for a 50-Minute Class

The students used in this procedure were enrolled in second-year English in the fall of 1994 at Ming-Hsin Institute of Technology and Commerce in Taiwan. Their average age was 16 and they were low-intermediate level in English. The class material was the *Family Album, USA, Book 1* (Keltly, 1991), which comprises a set of videos, a textbook, and a student workbook to teach the English language and culture. A communicative approach was employed, allowing students to hear authentic English speech and then to try to use it as they observed native speakers interacting in English cultural situations on video. *Book 1* has six video episodes, each with three acts. The general classroom procedures for each act are as follows:

### *I. Introduction of the video context (12-14 min.)*

1. Introduction of the video setting either in the mother tongue or in the target language depending on students' level of the language competence and teachers' familiarity of students' mother tongue (1-2 min.).
2. Presentation of new vocabulary and six to eight key sentences on the board or projected on screen (as an advance organizer) (2 min.).
3. Watching the video for the first time without captions (4-5 min.).
4. Watching the video for the second time with target language captions (4-5 min.).

II. *Workbook Exercises (7 min.)*

1. Assimilating the act's vocabulary and grammar into workbook activities using the soundtrack only accompanied by workbook exercises. The teacher may intervene to review, pause, replay, and check students' performance of workbook activities.

III. *Formal Explanations in the Mother Tongue (5 min.)*

IV. *Mechanical Oral Drills (6 min.)*

1. Repetition drills (chorally).
2. Substitution drills.
3. Pair-practice.

V. *Communicative Drills (focus on what is said rather than on how it is said) (10 min.)*

1. Questioning students individually.
2. Role playing

VI. *Evaluation (10 min.)*

Give a dictation, a cloze test, or essay questions relating to the video segment.

## **Preliminary Qualitative Results**

A preliminary qualitative assessment of the effectiveness of using the above procedures was conducted by handing out a Likert questionnaire to 204 students involved at the end of the semester. Aside from background materials, the major findings are:

1. 70% of the participants agreed that the use of captions in the target language was beneficial to them in their understanding of the content of the video;
2. 77% agreed that the six to eight summarized sentences provided by the teacher before viewing the video were helpful to them in understanding the video; and
3. 79% agreed that an explanation of vocabulary, idioms, and phrases by the teacher prior to seeing the video was helpful to them in understanding the video.

Given these positive qualitative results, a follow-up quantitative assessment is currently being planned for the Fall 1996 semester, the results of which will be detailed in a future article.

## **Conclusions**

The more meaningful the advance organizer, the greater the impact it has on the comprehension and retention of the language that was used in the rather

lengthy subsequent video (Herron, 1994). Thus teachers are encouraged to include a previewing stage to help students with comprehension. In addition, videos with captions help students associate the spoken and written forms of words more easily and quickly than videos without captions. It is suggested that teachers integrate advance organizers and captioned video materials to provide students with a more effective learning environment. A set of classroom procedures for combining the uses of advance organizers and captioned video materials is proposed. Given the positive outcomes of the preliminary qualitative assessment, a quantitative assessment of the effectiveness of the proposed method is warranted.

### *The Author*

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