

# Video in the EFL classroom: What to look for and how to use it.

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## I . Introduction

Over the past two decades video has become entrenched in our daily lives. Youtube, blogs, online news, even newspaper stories have turned to using slideshows to summarize stories for their online readers. Indeed the ubiquitous cameras on city streets and on police officers have brought us stories that may never have been seen without this technology. Certainly the use of video has increased in the classroom but not to the extent that it has pervaded life on the outside. There is still a debate over what video and even if video is useful for learners of English. Should it be authentic? What is authentic? Should it be scripted or unscripted? Are dialogues better than lectures? What makes video better than audio or print? How can video be used to enhance not just listening but also speaking? This paper will address these issues and more using practical examples from 15 years experience in the field of educational video production as well as current research. The aim is to give teachers a better idea of the kinds of video available, to discuss the advantages and pitfalls associated with each kind, and finally, show how teachers need to actively teach the content with an eye on communicative competence.

## II. The Value of Video

This paper will argue that video is not inherently superior simply because it is video. Careful attention must be paid to characters and story, the target audience, as well as the purpose of the lesson. As Elvis Wagner (2007) states, “a general consensus seems to have emerged among L2 listening researchers that the non-verbal components of spoken communication are an important component of L2 listening ability, and that L2 listeners are able to more easily construct the meaning of a spoken text that includes non-verbal input than a spoken text that does not include non-verbal input (e.g., Allan, 1984; Altman, 1990; Baltova, 1994; Gruba, 1997; Hasan, 2000; Kellerman, 1990, 1992; Progosh, 1996; Shin, 1998)” (pg. 67). While there is little doubt as to the value of video in general, there are many types of video and examining a few would be beneficial as not all are equal.

## 1. Lecture vs. Dialogue

Wagner (2007) was one of the first researchers to examine whether students were actually watching the screen. This was done during test-taking and he found that students, “did not find the video "distracting" (as a number of researchers have conjectured). Rather, the test-takers in this study seemed willing and eager to watch the video texts” (pg.78). He did, however find that students watched the screen at a different rate. He concluded that “The statistical analysis indicated that the percentage of time test-takers oriented to the video monitor for the three dialogue texts (72%) was higher than the percentage of time they oriented to the three lecture texts (67%)”(pg.79). While two-thirds is not a bad rate, the result is significant. Having made both types of textbooks, it will be important to look later at which is more suitable for which type of classroom later in this paper.

## 2. Audio vs. Video

As mentioned previously, nearly a third of students may not be watching the video. Why not be content with audio? Doesn't the true test of a language learner lie in whether the words are understood? Why should teachers add more to what may already be a stressful situation? The answer may well be in what is closer to real life. In real life conversations we have non-verbal cues that certainly aid in understanding context. One of the few times speakers outside the classroom do not see their counterpart in conversation is when using a telephone, which Kellerman (1990; 274) likens to “one of the most intimidating experiences language learners encounter. If seeing the speaker's lips, eyes, and facial expressions is an important part of natural conversation, then it would make sense to include this information in second language listening exercises and proficiency tests.” It would also make sense to use it in daily classroom activities but only if it is clearly different from audio. This is one of the first places where a video material producer is apt to fail. The video must contain non-verbal cues that could only be imagined if it were audio.

## 3. Non-verbal communication

Research shows that listeners can utilize the information transmitted by the kinesic behavior of the speaker, including gestures, body movements, and facial expressions (Burgoon, 1994; Kellerman, 1992; Von Raffler-Engel, 1980). In real life conversation, it would be rare to find any face to face interaction where neither speaker is motionless and expressionless. Non-verbal communication is the norm but gestures do not always have the same meanings across cultures and interpretations can vary between individuals. One way to test the “non-verbal validity” of a dialogue is to first show it to a class without sound. Interpretations will vary but students generally become aware of who is feeling a certain way

even if they are unsure as to why. To illustrate this point, dialogue 1 is a short conversation between two speakers that is intended for lower level learners.

**Dialogue 1 from Unit 13 Communication Spotlight Starter (ABAX 2013)**

**ETHAN: Hey, Zoe!**

**ZOE: Hi Ethan.**

**ETHAN: How's it going?**

**ZOE: Pretty Good.**

**ETHAN: What did you do yesterday?**

**ZOE: Yesterday...Oh, I went shopping in Soho.**

**ETHAN: Soho...did you get anything?**

**ZOE: Yeah, I got some jeans.**

**ETHAN: Those jeans?**

**ZOE: No, new jeans.**

**ETHAN: Sorry, they look new.**

**ZOE: Nope.**

**ETHAN: What did you do last night? I called you. But you weren't home.**

**ZOE: What did I do last night? I went to a movie.**

**ETHAN: Nice, What did you see?**

**ZOE: A comedy. But it was stupid.**

**ETHAN: Really?**

**ZOE: Yeah.**

**ETHAN: Who did you go with?**

**ZOE: Stan.**

**ETHAN: Hmm...I don't know Stan.**

**ZOE: No. But he liked the movie. I thought it was stupid.**

**ETHAN: Stan? Is he a nice guy?**

**ZOE: I don't know. He's nice. But he likes stupid movies.**

The entire dialogue is included, as it will be referred to later, but in this case, look at the last two lines. The publisher asks students to determine whether or not Zoe might meet Stan again. As it is written, the answer could go either way. Just because someone likes “stupid movies,” does not necessary rule them out for a second date. “Nice,” is the key word here. If he is nice enough than it may supersede his less than stellar taste in movies and a second date may be possible. Even the tone of the word “nice” does not give away her judgment. Only when tone and facial expression are combined do the vast majority of students see her meaning and infer that she will probably never meet Stan again. Although, occasionally, some argue that her expression is meant to spare Ethan her true feelings for Stan. The fact that different valid interpretations exist only adds to the value of the medium.

The significance of facial expressions cannot be ignored. Even low level learners will know the meaning of the word “nice.” The connotations are good and only reading it in print, positive outcomes will be predicted. Word knowledge is just a piece of the puzzle here. As Woottipong said, “bottom-up and top-down processing is the view that listening comprehension concerns interactive processing. In other words, listening



comprehension is a mix of bottom-up and top-down processing” (pg.201). Woottipong later cites O’Malley, et al. (1989) who “found that effective second language listeners employed both top-down and bottom-up strategies to understand meaning whereas incompetent listeners interpret the meanings of individual words. The idea is that listening comprehension is the outcome of an interaction of a numbers of pieces of knowledge. This means that listeners have to use many types of knowledge” (pg.202).

A second example of how facial expressions and body language can be found in unit 14 of Hello New York. In this conversation, John is expecting that he and Aya will have a short conversation that will lead to a dinner date. He is sadly mistaken as he finds out she already has a date.

Dialogue 2 from Unit 14 Hello New York (Kinseido 2016)

#### **SCENE 14**

##### **You’re My Best Friend**

**Aya: Hey, John. Do you like sushi or ramen better?**

**John: Sushi or ramen? I like sushi better. It’s more expensive, more beautiful... It’s healthier, too.**

**Aya: Great. Do you know any good sushi restaurants?**

**John: Well, Hana Sushi near campus is definitely the best in town. I heard it’s as good as sushi from Japan. Why do you ask?**

**Aya: Well... Guess what?**

**John: What?**

**Aya: I asked Tom to dinner!**

**John: What?! Tom?!**

**Aya: Yes. He’s the smartest guy in my sociology class. Do you think he has a girlfriend? He’s so cool.**

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**John: Oh, I see. That's too bad. I mean, congratulations. I mean...**

**Aya: What do you mean, John?**

**John: I mean, you and me... we're just friends, then?**

**Aya: Of course, you're my best friend! Oh. Wait, I have to go now. Bye! Wish me luck!**

**John: Hey Emily. It's John. Guess what I just learned? Aya has a crush on Tom!**

Again, the entire dialogue is included as it will be used to illustrate other concepts. Near the end, there are the overwhelmingly positive words such as “congratulations” and “best friends.” For the beginning level student, it would be hard to catch the context without hearing the tone and, perhaps more importantly, seeing the expressions. Aya in the screen capture below has the expected expression when saying, “Of course, you're my best friend!”



There is, however, no escaping the sadness in John's eyes just after saying “congratulations” and before confirming that they are “just friends.”



The fact that his expression seems to escape Aya is somewhat puzzling but she can be forgiven as she is euphoric at this point which leaves John in utter shock.



Words need interpretation in context. Without tone or expression, words fall short of their potential. For a beginning learner of English, there is great value in listening to new vocabulary in a real context. Listening may be the default first skill if we think about how children first learn language. Underwood (1989) notes that “a child receives a large amount of verbal input through listening prior to developing speaking, writing and reading skills. These skills are developed later as the child matures. Children are also looking at facial expressions and body language for meaning long before they can comprehend the meaning of individual words” (pg. 61). Moreover, as Woottipong (2014) says, “it is necessary to develop listening skill in the initial stage of learning in order to become a good speaker. Finally, listening exercises help to draw a learner's attention to new forms in the language i.e. vocabulary, grammar and interaction patterns” (pg. 201).

#### **4. Spoken Vocabulary and Grammar**

##### **4.1 Vocabulary**

Spoken language can be vastly different from written language. Lexical and grammatical characteristics differ because, for one reason, speakers can make use of tone and non-verbal strategies. If the goal is to have students speaking and listening in a real way then every lesson should be taught in context.

Returning to dialogue 1, in the last two lines, there is a rare case where Japanese students believe they know the meaning of a phrase but soon find out that it means something quite different. Let's take another look:

**ETHAN:** Stan? Is he a nice guy?

**ZOE:** I don't know. He's nice. But he likes stupid movies.

The majority of Japanese university students have heard “nice guy.” Most have then used it as it has become part of the Japanese language. It does, however, have a different meaning than English. The definition in English of “nice” meaning kind is replaced with a “cool” or “handsome” in the Japanese version. Ethan's tone in the video is one of caring and concern not jealousy of competitiveness so the Japanese definition of good looking does not make sense at first listen. Only after actively teaching the phrase and having it used in context along with non-verbal communication do students internalize it. When students then mirror the language in class, most students tend to mimic the intonation and facial expressions of the speakers on video.

A Second example of this is the use of the word OK. OK is one of the most versatile words in the English language. It can mean virtually anything depending on how it is said. The Japanese connotation is generally positive though. In another video where one character asks, “How was the movie?” The response was a very unenthusiastic, “It was OK.” When asking students for another word for “OK” in this context, the replies, after one viewing, were overwhelmingly, “Good.” This was despite the fact that the character showed no positive emotion or raised tone. After several viewings, most students change their answer to “so-so.” This is also problematic as “so-so” is extremely dated and mostly out of use. The main reason that Japanese learn this is because the word “ma-ma” in Japanese is an easy way for students to remember and use the word.

There is research on this having to do with gestures as a communicative device and it would also seem that facial expressions could also be included. As Morett, Gibbs, and MacWhinney, (2012). said, research “revealed that speakers produce gestures that are more iconic, elaborate, and larger when they are speaking to an interlocutor who is present and visible, as opposed to an interlocutor who is present but occluded or an interlocutor who is on the phone (Alibali, Heath, & Myers, 2001; Bavelas, Gerwing, Sutton, & Prevost, 2008).”(pg. 773). These results suggest that speakers do indeed use gesture as a communicative device.” It is the combination then of having the actors model the speech in context and then having the students use the phrases in class that can aid in listening, speaking, and vocabulary retention.

## 4.2 Grammar

McCarthy and Carter (2001) say, “We have argued that spoken grammar highlights the textual and interpersonal aspects of messages because of its face-to-face nature; it would be a severe injustice if we, as a profession, refused to investigate its grammar, or closed our eyes to what we can know about how real users use it in everyday life in order to help our learners become better global communicators” (pg.74). One of the first things Japanese learn is the greeting:

**A: How are you?**

**B: Fine, thank you. And you?**

Students repeat this with military precision and while it is not grammatically wrong, it is unnerving as a greeting because it lacks any emotion at all. It is also not that common. Can anyone find a recent movie where these words are used in exactly this order? If an example can be found, it will take some searching and it will certainly not be the most common greeting. Looking back at dialogue one, it begins:

**ETHAN: Hey, Zoe!**

**ZOE: Hi Ethan.**

**ETHAN: How’s it going?**

**ZOE: Pretty Good.**

This is a much more natural greeting so why are students so unfamiliar with it at first? Surely the more natural greeting is more difficult to teach but that is not a good reason for omission. Woottipong points out that “spoken language provides a means of interaction for the learner. Furthermore, a learner’s failure to understand the language they hear is an incentive, not a barrier, to interaction and learning” (pg.201). One of the highest goals of teaching any language should be communicative competence in real life situations. Awareness as to how spoken grammar differs from written can be taught and will be explored later in the paper. If standardized reading and writing tests are the main goal then they should be taught another way but to improve speaking and listening the material should err on the side of authenticity. But what does authentic mean?

## 5. Authenticity

If teachers want to increase communicative competence in real life interactions then it follows that teaching materials should also be “real life.” As Woottipong says, “There are several benefits of employing authentic materials for language learning and teaching. First, they can provide examples for learners of how to communicate in real life situations through

exposing them to the sorts of messages they will likely face in everyday conversation. Second, authentic materials can help the learner focus on the language skills they truly need and ignore skills they may not need for their job or studies” (pg. 203). If listening and speaking texts are concerned entirely with grammar and getting students to repeat then students, no matter how well they learn the task in class, will be somewhat bewildered on the outside. There is quite a bit of agreement on what constitutes authenticity:

***An authentic text is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort. (Morrow, 1977, p. 13)***

***Authentic texts (either written or spoken) are those which are designed for native speakers: they are real texts designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language in question. (Harmer, 1983, p. 146)***

***A rule of thumb for authentic here is any material which has not been specifically produced for the purposes of language teaching. (Nunan, 1989, p. 54)***

The bulk of material from the first book I produced videos for in 2006 consisted entirely from interviews with native speakers. Almost nothing was altered. Non teacher, native speakers of English spoke unscripted at real speed and the result was that although the content was interesting, most of the class time was spent deciphering the differences between written and spoken grammar. It was authentic but in class, it mostly did not translate into production of the language. Not to say it was a waste of time, learners certainly noticed how real language worked and the content was ripe for discussion once everyone understood what was said. The result, however, was that I became less obsessed with authenticity and looked for a balance between language content for learners and true spoken language. There are different types of authenticity. There is authenticity of task, of language, and of situation. Breen states four types:

1. Authenticity of the texts which we may use as input data for our learners.
2. Authenticity of the learners own interpretation of such texts.
3. Authenticity of the tasks conducive to language learning.
4. Authenticity of the actual social situation of the language classroom. (Breen, 1985, p. 61)

Looking at these types, it can easily be seen that language materials never succeed completely nor do they fail. Authenticity is relative and there are degrees. One example from a textbook used some time ago asked,

**Are you washing the dog?  
Pardon me?**

**Are you washing the dog?**

**No, I am not. I am not washing the dog. I am washing the cat.**

Students were meant to work in pairs and repeat this to one another. The absurdity of the language is clear and it seems to fail every test of authenticity but it may, however, teach students something about the way that language works. If this is only a class about written grammar then I cannot call it a complete waste of time for a beginning learner. I might even say that the way clarification is asked for is not authentic as I have heard, “pardon me?” about five times in the last 40 years but this is where relativity comes in. The use of “pardon me” may be much more valid for a Canadian than someone from New York State.

### **III. The Product**

#### **1. Manufacturing Authenticity**

It is possible now to produce authentic materials that are made for the language classroom. Attention has to be paid to the different lexical and grammatical characteristics of spoken grammar. Beyond that, careful consideration should be given to authenticity of task. What can be done in the classroom with the video produced? There are parts of unscripted speech that should be written in to dialogues. Restarting, filling-time strategies, and hesitation are all parts of spoken, unscripted speech that can be employed. The latter is particularly effective for lower level learners to hear and see as it is natural with the added benefit of allowing to listener to catch up with what is being said. There is an example of this in dialogue 2 when John receives a bit of a shock:

**John: Oh, I see. That’s too bad. I mean, congratulations. I mean...**

**Aya: What do you mean, John?**

**John: I mean, you and me... we’re just friends, then?**

It is perfectly natural for John to hesitate and restart. In the lesson, students can be shown that, just like in their own language, grammar can be different when spoken.

#### **2. Trust the actors**

Examining video from the perspective of production may help teachers make better choices of material and also to understand what can be done with the content in terms of output. Most dialogue scenes are short and they should be to hold the attention of the learners. How to start each scene is a dilemma because it would not be authentic or interesting to start with similar greetings each time. Film sets vary in the production of English teaching material. On the higher end, there is a crew of 5-6 video professionals who

have to concept of what an English teaching classroom is like. They are overseen by 1-3 people from the publishing house to make sure that the script is followed exactly as it was written by the author who is a professional materials writer. In this situation, spontaneity of emotion and use of language is frowned upon. Sometimes it works but usually the result is somewhat uninspired and institutional. Some of the more progressive sets employ less people and free the actors up to make natural choices with language and emotion. Surely, there is a set of strategies, vocabulary and grammar that need to happen but unscripted language not only will find its way into the final product, it will be used as a teaching moment. The iZone series by Pearson had a natural language corner devoted to explaining the spoken language point where actors would go off script. It was a very progressive idea and it is now out of print. A modest example of how things can spontaneously change can be seen in Dialogue 1. The original script was written as:

**ETHAN: Hey, how's it going? What did you do yesterday?**

**ZOE: Yesterday...Oh, I went shopping in Soho.**

**ETHAN: Soho...did you get anything?**

**ZOE: Yeah, I got some jeans.**

While this is not criminally artificial, the actors noticed it was too abrupt to be natural. Why wouldn't the first question be answered before the second one asked? By changing it to its final form, it becomes less like an interrogation:

**ETHAN: Hey, Zoe!**

**ZOE: Hi Ethan.**

**ETHAN: How's it going?**

**ZOE: Pretty Good.**

**ETHAN: What did you do yesterday?**

**ZOE: Yesterday...Oh, I went shopping in Soho.**

**ETHAN: Soho...did you get anything?**

**ZOE: Yeah, I got some jeans.**

The point here is that professional actors are not language teachers and so they can help build the bridge between what the writer wants to happen in the language lesson and what is true in real life spoken language. Forcing actors what they do not feel comfortable saying can lead to very awkward language so it is best to collaborate whenever possible.

### **3. Natural Pronunciation**

In general, actors are trained to enunciate each syllable and while that can be good as learners can easily understand, authenticity can be sacrificed. The solution again, is

somewhere in middle ground. In dialogue 3 below, the character playing Emily was directed to speak naturally and not be concerned with pronouncing every syllable. The result was a more realistic characterization of authentic spoken language. In the classroom, however, there was one word that was nearly impossible for students to understand without some form of consciousness-raising. The word was “not.”

**Aya: Excuse me, is this seat taken? There’s a backpack on it.**

**Emily: Oh, I’m sorry. That’s mine. No one’s sitting here. Help yourself.**

**Aya: Thanks. This is Drama 101, isn’t it?**

**Emily: Yes, it is. Professor Dexter’s class. His classes are always crowded. We’re early.**

**Aya: Is he a popular professor?**

**Emily: He really is. He’s not an ordinary teacher. He’s really fun and interesting. Also, he’s very handsome!**

**Aya: Great. I look forward to it. My name is Ayaka, by the way. You can call me Aya.**

**Emily: It’s good to meet you, Aya. I’m Emily. Do you like drama?**

**Aya: Yes, that’s why I’m here. How about you?**

**Emily: Umm, it’s not my favorite subject, actually. But Prof. Dexter is my favorite!**

Ninety percent of students over the past three years could not catch the word “not.” The lesson here though is not that the conversation failed in the classroom. On the contrary, there is a teachable moment. When teachers explain when linking occurs and the “t” that becomes a soft “d,” students become aware and are better equipped to understand it the next time it occurs. Of course there were complaints from students and teachers that “not” was impossible to understand. Once students are exposed to such consciousness-raising activities and they begin to improve, they see the value soon enough. As for teachers, the last thing you want in a video lesson promoting communicative competence, is for every student to understand every word the first time they see it. The challenge in this profession is to help students to see things so that eventually they will not need a teacher. If every word is understood from the start, the teacher is already expendable.

#### **4. Real World Publishing**

Naturally, real world spoken language and publishers obligations do not always intersect. Even teachers asking for authentic material may also want to teach for standardizing grammar tests in the same class so publishers have little choice but to try and find solutions for both. Output needs to be comprehensible but should also be as natural as possible. Video material should contain backpedaling, reduction, linking and other aspects of naturally spoken language. If too much time is spent, however, on decoding spoken language then output activities may never happen at all. There needs to be balance but not at the expense of teaching what is clearly unnatural.

#### 4.1 Rate

If there is one aspect of language that is overly compromised in Japan, it is certainly the rate at which speakers talk in the video material. The result is that teachers and material creators are undercutting their own goals. If input is too slow then students leave the classroom wholly unprepared to understand in English in the outside world. The justification for unnaturally slow input is that beginning students need to understand outweighs the need to be natural. There are ways, however, to find a middle ground. First, scenes for low level learners should be kept short. They should be somewhere between 1-2 minutes. Next, the text and teacher should provide a lot of support in terms of vocabulary and schema. Finally students should be reminded how quickly they speak in their native language. There is no language that has a monopoly on speed of talking or interaction. In fact, N.J. Enfield, in *How We Talk* notes striking similarities between most languages in the world. In the introduction he states, “There average time that people take to respond to a question is about the same time it takes to blink the eye: 200 milliseconds.” Furthermore, “There is a standard one-second time window for responding in conversation: It helps us gauge whether a response is fast, on time, late, or unlikely to arrive at all.” (pg.1) This, of course, comes naturally in the native language but it would take a great deal of natural input to arrive at this level of comfort in the L2. Dialogue 4 (below) meets the requirement of natural speed and response times. The language and context are not difficult but the natural speed will pose a challenge to lower level university students in Japan because they have most likely been fed slow conversations in their first six years of instruction.

**Linda:** ... And we're home.

**Yuka:** Is this your house?

**Linda:** Yeah.

**Yuka:** Wow, it's really nice!

**Linda:** Thanks.

**Linda:** This is my brother Ken. Ken, this is Yuka.

**Ken:** Hi, Yuka. Welcome to L.A.

**Yuka:** Thanks. I'm so excited to be here!

**Linda:** And this is Ken's best friend Andy.

**Andy:** Nice to meet you, Yuka.

**Yuka:** Nice to meet you, too.

**Linda:** Let's get your suitcase.

**Ken:** Here, let me help you.

**Yuka:** Are you sure? It's very heavy.

**Ken:** It's no problem. ... Oh, it's ... really heavy!

**Yuka:** Sorry. I'm not good at packing. I always take everything.

There is a good deal of visual support here with the shaking of hands and lifting of the suitcase so the context is never in doubt. Students will not, however, hear each individual word when they first listen. Again, the instructor must play a part and help learners to notice the differences in spoken language. It is progressive and impressive that the spoken parts of this video are only 33 seconds and all responses fit neatly into the one-second response time mentioned by Enfield.

#### **4.2 The Great Concession**

Interestingly enough, a concession had to be made by the publisher. Included with the video is a wholly separate audio track that takes a full 41 seconds to finish the lines in the script. Publishing is a business and it would not be wise to ignore what a fair number of teachers are used to and expecting. I believe that most teachers will opt to use the natural version and teach the material. There is a slight concern though that if students are only exposed to the audio version, which also has unnatural intonation, they may be learning something other than English. The solution here is teacher training. Video material is not something that should be shown while the teacher walks away only to return and ask, “Did you catch that?”

### **IV. Practical Steps Using Video**

As Bajrami and Ismaili (2016) note, “While viewing the video materials, students can put themselves in the vivid atmosphere created by the video materials and understand the pragmatics of the language used by the characters. Compared with traditional English teaching, such courses truly put into practice the student-centered teaching strategies.” Watching video alone is not a student-centered activity. Yet, there are so many possibilities when using video that it is hard to know where to begin. Perhaps mentioning what should be avoided may be a good place to start. With print, you cannot examine intonation and with audio, non-verbal communication can only be imagined.

#### **1. Speechless**

Most useful lessons take a look at what students already know and build upon those things. A teacher can easily bore a class by teaching known content. With video, students need to be made aware that communication is more than words so why not remove the words at first viewing? In groups, students can discuss what has been seen looking for context in the setting and meaning in actions and gestures. The teaching strategy is twofold here. As mentioned, it is a consciousness raising activity designed to notice context and non-verbal communication but it is also the start of making the class truly student-centered. Groups

will come up with ideas and even dialogue if the actors and story are rich enough. Lower level learners have come up with exact lines more times than I can count. This is a good first step in the process of discovery because it allows students to be creative and teachers to build upon that creativity. Let's return to Dialogue 4 to see how this might work. This is the first chapter and as many first chapters tend to be, it involves meeting people. In this case, at least two people are



meeting for the first time. Students can guess who the characters are and try using the language. Most students will be correcting in guessing, "Nice to meet you." The use, however, of "this is..." when a third person is introducing others will most likely be new. The final part of the video involves a physical action that should be easy to guess but challenging to find the proper language.



If I could add more expressions and show the difficulty of lifting the suitcase, it would be easy to see that the students could infer the word "heavy" will be used followed by some explanation. Of course the reason behind the heavy suitcase is wide open and should be fun

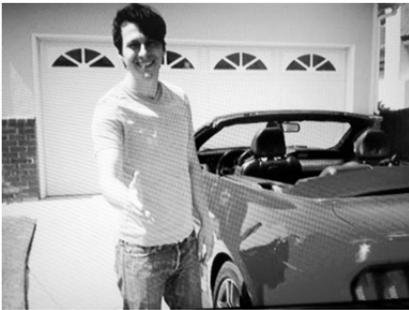
for the students to come up with a story. This first viewing without sound sets the tone for creativity and collaboration in any student-centered classroom. It also foreshadows what will be the final activity.

## 2. Pre-Listening Language Support

Now that students have some idea of context, the next step should be to give some language support in terms of speaking strategies and vocabulary. Most textbooks tend to do this before watching but if raising awareness of the many different ways people interact and the goal is communicative competence, then language should come after watching. In this example, there are outtake videos that look at key expressions in the scene. They are made with an interactive feel in mind:

**Ken:** Hi, Yuka. Welcome to L.A.  
**Yuka:** (Thanks. I'm so excited to be here!)

The key expression video shows Ken speaking his line then the frame freezes so that students can begin to produce the target language. It is a positive take on simply repeating. Students are responding to a video prompt that displays proper eye contact and gestures.



It is important to bring students into the world by having them understand context and introducing them to new characters before introducing the language aspects. Research has shown Woottipong (2014) that, “Analysis of the students’ responses from the questionnaire revealed that they were more interested in learning English if the teacher used English videos as teaching materials. In addition, the keyword preview before watching videos motivated them to learn English. They explained that it was easier for them to remember and understand vocabulary in the video which they had previously taught by the researcher during the pre-listening stage” (pg. 209).

### **3. Comprehension**

After bringing students into the world of the video, it is time to see what is new to the students in terms of language or context after watching the video a few times. Shadowing can be helpful here and pronunciation work as well. The class should get to the point where the input is understood but learn that comprehension is not the final goal.

### **4. Output**

While some teachers may be satisfied that students understand all the content, they should not stop there. Research shows that video can convey something more than just the ability to comprehend. With visual input, the listener can more easily identify the role of the speaker and the context of the situation (Baltova, 1994; Gruba, 1997; Rubin, 1995). These ideas of role and context are what should be the jumping off point for output. It is an added benefit if the story has some relevance to the life of the student because as Suvurov (2009) cites, “visual elements can activate the listener’s background knowledge (Ockey, 2007; Rubin, 1995)” (pg. 54). The natural step then would be for students to create a story using the information from the video. They could even make a video since nearly every student carries a video capable phone every day.

## **V. Psychology**

### **1. Character and Story**

As mentioned previously, it would be ideal if the story in the video activated the background knowledge of the student. It would be easier then, for the student to take on a role in a situation once armed with the language to play that role. As much as video situations have been used in the past two decades, producers still struggle making interesting content. This makes sense as gifted writers would graduate pretty quickly from writing scripts for textbooks. For the most part, language concerns have been a greater concern than plot. Textbook producers have made strides recently making series with interesting characters that evolve over time. The iZone series from Pearson (now out of print) is one case where the actors reported getting quite a bit of fan mail.

### **2. Experience-Taking**

The previously mentioned series is more the exception than the rule. It would be interesting to find out if learners could develop an affinity to certain characters that viewers do to characters in a tv series. Recent studies in psychology show that fans can actually develop such a relationship with characters that they take on certain traits of that character.

The idea is that a viewer or even a reader takes on the experience of a character and is more apt to make decisions in real life once they have “taken” that experience from the character. A study by Kaufman and Libby (2012) said that in experience-taking:

**readers simulate the events of a narrative as though they were a particular character in the story world, adopting the character’s mindset and perspective as the story progresses rather than orienting themselves as an observer or evaluator of the character ... the greater the ability of a reader to simulate the subjective experience of a character—the greater the potential that story has to change the reader’s self-concept, attitudes, and behavior. (p. 2).**

It would be fascinating to find out if language learners could take on the traits and characteristics of characters modeling language. The concern, of course, for the language teacher, would be if the student could take on the language of a character. Is it possible that characters with more depth or who are a part of more interesting stories be better at modeling language? Currently there is an unwritten rule that characters in textbooks are nice. They are not allowed to do anything to offend even inadvertently. If characters could have arcs and be more multi-faceted, there may be room for research on language and experience-taking.

## VI. Concerns

### 1. Distractions

Life is full of distractions. Why would a language teacher want to bring video, with all the non language-related distractions that accompany it, into the classroom? Well, the answer is that authenticity demand it because, life is full of distractions and so is language. Still many researchers have voiced concern, including Bejar et al. (2000), stated "There is no doubt that video offers the potential for enhanced face validity and authenticity, although there is a lot of concern about its potential for distraction" (p. 28). Buck (2001) even implied that video should be avoided in testing because people, “differ quite considerably in their ability to utilize visual information” (p. 172). Testing may have a different aim but if the goal is real life communicative competence then helping students to filter



distractions, both in the language and visually, is absolutely necessary. It can even be argued that these authentic distract actions are what make video the most interesting format to learn language. Take, for example a screenshot from Dialogue 2. Again, the story is a kind of break-up. That is if a couple can break-up without ever having been together. We have Aya gazing into the future, happily thinking of her date with Tom. Her body language shows that John hardly exists to her. She does not see him reaching out desperately. The body language here only adds meaning but the background could be considered a distraction. This is one of the most popular date spots in NYC. Couples happily row their boats in the background while John's great expectations fall completely flat. Tourists move in and out of the framing snapping selfies. Adding to the contrast is the man walking a bicycle built for two, alone. It is chaos. As mentioned previously, the language is also chaotic with restarts, hesitation, and overall emotional miscommunication. For teachers all of these things could be distractions but doesn't the chaos come closer to what communication is like in real life?

## **2. Level**

Certainly the level of the class needs to be taken into account. If learners could simply watch movies, TV, and Youtube then there would be no need to produce videos for language learning. The content on Youtube far exceeds anything publishers could produce on their own, but the internet has a weakness. Language is unruly and level of difficulty can be erratic in even the most basic conversations. For the higher level learner of English, lectures or movie content may be best but for those beginning, more structure is needed. As Thompson (2007) reminds us, "Krashen (1981), language acquisition requires more than mere exposure to a language. The L2 input must be at the right level and must engage the learner. The ideal input is at a level just above the learner's comprehension level, but with enough scaffolding that the learner can still understand it. He referred to this as the "i + 1" (input plus one) concept. Scaffolding in this context comes from extra-linguistic information present in the immediate environment. This idea of scaffolding to bring the learner up to the next level is similar in some ways to Vygotsky's (1978) Zones of Proximal Development" (pg. 293).

## **VII. Further Discussion**

This paper is meant to help find ways to counter the reality that many learners become linguistically lost outside the classroom. Video in textbooks may hinder more than help if the spoken input is overly artificial. In the long term, teachers should not be training students how to better understand textbooks. Textbooks should take on the responsibility of facilitating the transition of language learners from the classroom to the real world. The paper argues that video is the format best suited to the challenge. Simplified input and translation does not prepare students for the outside world. Although completely authentic

material is beyond the grasp of beginning learners, producers of video materials can consciously employ characteristics from real spoken conversations. With careful planning, video dialogues can allow learners to experience interesting characters, in real situations using non-verbal communication almost as it would be outside the classroom. This type of authenticity can be manufactured. Educational video for English language learners can imitate life. It can be real and level appropriate, allowing learners to experience real world input and, if used properly, a chance to improve output as well.

It would be very interesting to see any research dealing with the psychological phenomena of “experience-taking” and if it can ever be applied to language learning. For this to happen, material developers will have to move beyond merely situational dialogues and spend more time developing robust characters. On a more practical level it would be useful to see how video can enhance output. Most of the research now is concerned with input which may or may not be similar to audio-only. My hope as a video producer and teacher is that educators of students will demand more authentic material and that publishers will respond by making video that is carefully produced to immerse learners of English into a world that is, although structured, nearly as authentic as life outside the classroom.

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