The Use of Video in a Speech Class
—Recording Students’ Performance

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1. Introduction
Because we Japanese are increasingly involved in close relations with other nations and of necessity must communicate in English, we English teachers have the responsibility of improving and establishing our students’ basic communicative ability in English. Because understanding information is essential to the mutual understanding of the people of all nations, and because internationally relevant information is most widely distributed via the mass media, it is desirable to enable our students to understand news communicated in English. This article reports and attempts to involve the students in a simulated mass media news program.

As a project for a college-level speech class, a number of ten-minute reports, presented by groups of four to six students, were videotaped in November, 1983 and in August, 1984. The reports, which were to simulate a televised news program, were the original, creative work of students in a speech class of the Department of English of the Junior College at the University of the Ryukyus.

This project was selected for the purpose of (1) giving the students a chance to observe their communication activities objectively, (2) providing the students an opportunity for using English in a given context, (3) encouraging the students to learn the spirit of cooperation through group activities, and (4) cultivating the students’ creativity, imagination and originality.

2. Discussion of the Advantages of the Project
2.1. Why Videotaping?
A video camera is one of the most effective tools to help students analyze their own performance objectively. Students find it useful to be able to see themselves as others see them. Besides, videotaping allows for the possibility of repetitive viewing, so the students can see not only what they have done but also how well and how badly they have done. Moreover, when the students view the recorded film, they are able to recognize the value of their having been recommended to use charts, graphs, maps and background music. In this way they learn that properly used aids assist the performing group in conveying their message to the viewers who decode the message. The students learn that communication is more effective and easier with proper visual aids and gestures.

2.2. Why a News Report?

Since students have already acquired some stock of basic structures and useful expressions, what they need is opportunities to express themselves. Giving oral reports based on previously written short compositions provided a valuable opportunity for self-expression. Limiting the topics and length of the compositions to those appropriate for a news report (including features and commercials) has a number of advantages. The communication line of news has to be direct and concise. Therefore, its message should be clear, concrete, precise and simple. These are necessary characteristics of the style for effective speeches and writing.

In order to write a clear composition, students have to choose what they think to be the best writing style among many possible and correct expressions. In reading each other’s news reports, the students experience the difficulty of comprehending long, complex sentences. In this way they learn that using natural and easy-to-understand language in writing their own reports is more important than simply using correct grammar.

They also learn that in order to produce a satisfying news report, they must acquire experience and knowledge from listening to news reports and reading news articles. As for collecting the topics for their news program, this is relatively easy for the students because information can be easily obtained from journals, newspapers, TV, radio and so on. Although it is highly desirable to collect information uttered or written in English, for this project I permitted the students to obtain information given in Japanese,
which they would translate later. In addition, students were permitted and even encouraged to create their own fictional news.

2.3. Description of the Students and the Advantages of Group Activities

As our school is a night school, most of the students work in the daytime. They do not have many opportunities to talk with their classmates. For this reason absenteeism is more of a problem than in regular university classes. Group activity helped improve my students’ situation in the following ways:

(1) Students became closer with one another by working together.
(2) Shy students joined the group activities with less fear and pressure in performing and working for the project owing to the cooperation and encouragement of the group members.
(3) Because such group activities provide a type of social experience, the students shared the pleasure and satisfaction of accomplishing the project with their group members and they cultivated their social sensibility by discussing, practicing and performing the project.

3. Procedure

3.1. Announcement to the Class

When the class was first told of the plan to videotape student news reports, each lasting about ten minutes, panic occurred. The students were terrified of making mistakes, of having to speak ten minutes in English, and of memorizing a written script prepared by themselves. I eliminated their fear by stressing the value of fluency rather than accuracy, by pointing out that the time of the ten-minute exposure on the screen would be shared as equally as possible by four to six people, and by suggesting that their written work did not have to be memorized.

No class time, however, was to be spent for preparation for the project. Consequently, the students had to work at home and arrange to have their group activities after class or at some other time when they could get together. This was important because the students were encouraged to share the work as equally as possible, help each other and make comments on one another’s work and progress.

Students were encouraged to use variety in their news program, such as
by newscasting, interviewing, acting out the event, making commercials and so on. In this regard, it is interesting to note that students especially enjoyed making commercials, for which they used many props, changed costumes and sometimes even danced to music. It seemed that the students’ creativity, imagination and originality were expressed particularly by the making of commercials.

The groups were not allowed to exchange information with each other, because it was deemed more interesting for the students not to know in advance how and what the other groups would perform. Each group would see only the finished product, on video film, of the other groups.

3.2. Group Work

Since in this case teamwork was vitally important for a successful group activity, students chose their own partners before starting to work on the project. They arranged the schedule and then started to collect information individually. After collecting enough information, each group selected the topics and arranged their own news reports. At that time, written work by individuals was started and was corrected by the group. When the members of the group became satisfied with the written work, they began to practice and rehearse their performance.

Every group reportedly had at least two meetings a week, each lasting from two to three hours, for about a month.

3.3. The Recording Event

The students’ group performance were videotaped during three consecutive nights when there were no classes. It took about two hours to record each group’s ten-minute session because of the necessity for rehearsal, arrangement of set and props, change of costume, and numerous adjustments of the camera and sound equipment to accommodate the students’ wishes.

Needless to say, in videotaping the students’ performance, the cooperation of the lab technicians was indispensable. They set up the room, the lights, the camera and the sound equipment, and their patience and encouragement made the recording task less burdensome than it might otherwise have been.

4. Performance

For reference, I would like to present here some of the news reports and
one of the commercials made by the students. (Note: The grammatical errors are the students' errors; see section 5.2. of this paper.)

Example 1: News Report

Today, on the Kokusai Street in Naha City, a boy carelessly dropped his coin on his foot and was seriously injured in the foot. He was immediately taken to the nearest Nago Hospital by ambulance, and he has been treated there. His doctor says he is now out of danger.

Example 2: News Report

In the United States of America, the presidential election campaign is now being held actively between President Reagan and the Democratic candidate Mr. Mondale. For the time being, President Reagan leads Mr. Mondale and it means there is a great possibility of his reelection. However, Mr. Mondale is gradually becoming popular among children. Therefore, we cannot say who will be elected next president.

Example 3: Afternoon News Program

Student A: Good afternoon, everyone. The Lady's Time has come. How did you spend your time? From now on, let's enjoy this time together. Miss Zukeran, today on Okinawa, the temperature is over 40 degrees.

Student B: Oh! Really? Today is very hot, isn't it?

Student A: By the way, we would like to inform you of a good news about Sesoko Island. The Bridge which connects Sesoko Island with mainland Okinawa was completed. Islanders have been waiting for its completion. This bridge construction was started on April 1, 1979 and completed on this August 2. The islanders held the opening ceremony of the bridge in this morning.

Student B: According to what I heard, in this island, the villagers' daily goods were brought from mainland Okinawa by boat. So, if a bad weather continued for a long time, the villagers were forced to live under bad condition. But now, I think the problem will come to solution by the completion of the new bridge.

Student A: I hope so. Well, the next topic is about the Okinawa Food Fair which is held at the University of the Ryukyus. Reporter
Maeda is staying at the place where the fair is to be held. So, let’s call her up.

Students A and B: Miss Maeda!

Example 4: Typhoon Information

We are now in Typhoon Brute Condition One, Emergency. Typhoon Brute is located 80 nautical miles south west of Okinawa at 25.3 degrees north latitude moving north east at 8 knots. If typhoon Brute continues to move as forecast, damaging winds of 50 knots or greater are expected on Okinawa. Please keep a strict look out on the land and on the sea. Once again. All installations on Okinawa are now in Typhoon Condition One, Emergency. Thank you.

Example 5: Commercial

(Four students started dancing with the music. While they were dancing, another student appeared on the screen and talked as follows.)

Speaker: Ladies and Gentlemen. We present you a wonderful program to make you more beautiful and healthy. Actually, I succeeded in losing 100 kg. Please look at my beautiful body. I owe my success to aerobics they are doing now. Now, it’s your turn. Please call 268-2311. Crazy Aerobics Academy. We are looking forward to your visit.

5. Evaluation

5.1. Viewing the Video in Class and Offering Comments

The students and I viewed the video film during a later class period. It was quite apparent that everyone was happy to see themselves and their classmates on television; nonetheless, some students were disappointed to see that they had failed to perform as they had intended. At this viewing, they heard for the first time my comments on their performance. It is easy for the instructor to point out the students’ mistakes and give them negative comments; however, it is best to point out their good points first and then encourage them before offering criticism. It should be pointed out, however, that because it is difficult to watch the video and observe the reaction of the viewers (the students) simultaneously, I had previewed the film before showing it to the class.
5.2. Teacher’s and Students’ Evaluation of the Performance

In the evaluation of the performance, the viewers’ reaction is extremely important. Because the aim of a news program is to inform the viewers, observation of the viewers gives feedback on how well the performing group has conveyed its message.

Although after the classroom viewing of the film I offered comments, I

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EVALUATION SHEET

Name

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A. Preparation of the Project
B. Organization of Content
C. Style
   1. Choice of Words
   2. Composition and Grammar
   3. Sentence Structure
D. Memory
E. Delivery
   1. Articulation of the Speech Sounds
   2. Rhythm of Speaking (Stress and Intonation)
   3. Time
   4. Rate of Speaking
   5. Attitude of Communication
   6. Emphasis and Force
   7. Voice (Respiration, Phonation Resonance etc.)
     8. Gesture
     9. Eye Contact
     10. Adaptation to Audience
F. Use of Aids
G. Cooperation
H. Uniqueness of Presentation

Comments
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restricted those comments at that time to general, encouraging remarks. This was done in order to enable the observing students to write their own, independent evaluation of the performances. Because the students had previously been told that they would have to evaluate their classmates, they watched the video carefully.

The students’ evaluations were collected and reviewed before a written, comprehensive evaluation was given to each performing group. The incorporation of the students’ comments lessened the teacher’s subjectivity in the evaluation.

As for the written news reports (the basis of the performance), which had been corrected only by the students themselves, working in their groups, they were collected after the filming session. They were graded but not corrected.

For the evaluation of this project, I adapted the Evaluation Sheets provided on pages 35 and 38 in Wagner and Kawashima’s *An Introduction to English Speech*. Each student and the performing group are to be graded in this evaluation sheet.

6. Conclusion

Recording the students’ performance in a video takes considerable time and effort from both the students and the instructor. Nevertheless, it can provide excellent opportunities for the students to improve their skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing English. Further research is needed to find ways to effectively utilize this teaching procedure.

Bibliography


