

Developing Audio-Visual Content Comprehension: Employing Video Materials in a Japanese University Classroom to Scaffold Content and Vocabulary Awareness

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Abstract

This paper assesses the suitability of audio-visual materials, including the Web 2.0 device You-Tube, in EFL teaching, advocating their usage with Japanese university English majors. These media can be employed in a variety of ways, from engaging students and stimulating communicative interest to reinforcing vocabulary acquisition through combining usage with exercises that utilize the skills of reading writing, listening and speaking. However, this study is primarily concerned with the problematic role of culture in the English classroom, and examines the effectiveness of employing visual materials for the purpose of scaffolding a critical comprehension of cultural content to aid a broader definition of communicative competence. A teaching approach which sought to synthesize these joint aims within the context of a Communicative English class for Japanese students in 2011-12 is outlined. The effectiveness of this approach is then assessed and discussed through the examination of student vocabulary scores and qualitative and quantitative student response data.

1. Introduction

Audio-visual materials can be employed as a useful classroom tool in stimulating Japanese university students' interest in the acquisition of English language skills and content comprehension. According to Wright (1976:1) many types and styles of visual presentation media are useful for the language learner, whilst Lonergan argues that "video in the classroom offers exciting possibilities for language teaching and learning" (Lonergan,1995:1). A large scale survey conducted by Canning-Wilson (2000:2) illustrated that students expressed a preference for learning language through the

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use of videos. This may be attributed to the fact that videos contain the same paralinguistic cues which are used in everyday communicative structures (Lonergan, 1995:11), conveying a wealth of non-linguistic information, and therefore demonstrating that visual cues are important for language students. The popularity of classroom video materials can also be attributed to student familiarity with these media in their own lives. Around the world, many students spend large amounts of time creatively immersed in web 2.0 technologies such as social networking and You-Tube (Richardson, 2005:8), where creating, viewing and exchanging forms of online visual media are commonplace. However, despite using these audio visual media in their leisure time, students are often unable to use them when they attend class (5). Instead, within the traditional analogue classroom dynamic, they are often expected to interact with more old fashioned tools, such as textbooks, which may not be thematically or stylistically commensurate with their leisure interests. Whilst online visual media are often used interactively, textbooks are reflective of a one way, top down approach towards English teaching, and Thompson argues that “it is immediately noticeable that the context of what is said by learners is controlled at every point by the book” (Thompson, 1996:18).

Another growing concern amongst EFL practitioners relates to the question of Western specific cultural content found in English textbooks. Theorists such as Said (1979), Pennycook (1998), and Phillipson (1992) have already argued that the English language and its cultural accoutrements can be employed as tool of hegemony due to the ideology of colonialism that underpins it. This is especially concerning in an EFL context, where students are often mandated textbooks which, as a recent study has illustrated, are inundated with Western specific cultural and commercial references (Addison, 2011). Sell observes that, with students learning English to communicate with other non-native speakers, “the culture learners are invited to try out (Multicultural British, Commonwealth) will not perhaps be of much use in the immanent future” (Sell, 2005:90). These culturally specific references may well fail to engage students attention in class whilst also causing them to experience possible comprehension problems. Sahin notes that “without being aware of the literary tradition where that work is created, we cannot fully understand it (Sahin, 2002:299), whilst Gray observes that “clearly there is a need for more detailed research into how such content is perceived” (2010:730). This incongruity between digital and analogue worlds, and the differing types of cultural references embedded within them, may manifest itself in the English classroom in the form of dwindling student motivation and performance. In Japan, research conducted by Ireland (2012) illustrated that native and foreign teachers are increasingly concerned with the declining levels of Japanese students’ language skills, attributing this in part to students being easily distracted whilst displaying short attention spans. This has led to teaching practitioners searching for increasingly fresh ways to generate student interest in English classes and textbook topics, and

one key strategy is what Anderson refers to as “blending in” (Anderson, 1993:108). This entails identifying the contexts in which Japanese feel the most comfortable talking, and then simulating those situations in the classroom. Therefore, for the purpose of generating Japanese students communicative interest in English, the successful construction of student centered, culturally relevant materials appears to be a crucial issue, and an increasing number of teachers have begun to employ audio-visual materials as a method of complimenting this approach. Canning-Wilson’s study (2000) revealed student preference for increased use of audio-visual materials in the classroom, whilst other researchers argue that these media can enhance student understanding of culturally specific topics and contexts. Rivers (1981:399) claims that audio-visual materials contribute to the understanding of another culture by providing vicarious video contact with users of the language, whilst Cakir argues that by employing videos in an English class “the students contextualize the language they have learnt” (2006:71). This paper therefore seeks to assess the suitability of audio-visual materials for stimulating and engaging Japanese university English students, whilst also examining the effectiveness of using such media in tandem with class textbooks for the purpose of scaffolding cultural comprehension of content. This study will first outline some of the problems related to the role of culture in classroom language teaching materials before discussing how audio visual media can best be employed to combat these problems, complimenting and broadening the kinds of topics and themes contained in class textbooks.

2. Cultural Content in the English Classroom

The role of cultural content in the EFL classroom is at the centre of an ongoing discussion between theorists and practitioners. Some argue that we should, whenever possible, avoid teaching culture altogether, and Torikai recently suggested that “if English is to be taught as a tool of communication, then the teacher should at least make a conscious effort not to teach American or British culture without some really good reason...(and that this) is the only way to overcome the hegemony of the English language” (Torikai, 2011:1). Others maintain that culture cannot be so easily avoided in the language classroom. Kramsch observes that “culture is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least” (Kramsch, 1993:1). According to Kramsch, true communicative competence entails teaching culture, and that lack of cultural competence exposes the limitations of students’ communicative competence (1993:1), whilst Buttjes contends that language teaching cannot be separated from culture teaching, and in the table below (Figure 1) makes two important observations regarding this:

1. language codes cannot be taught in isolation because processes of sociocultural transmission are bound to be at work on many levels, e.g. the contents of language exercises, the cultural discourse of textbooks (Kramsch, 1988) and the teacher's attitudes towards the target culture;
2. in their role of "secondary care givers" language teachers needs to go beyond monitoring linguistic production in the classroom and become aware of the complex and numerous processes of intercultural mediation that any foreign language learner undergoes....

Figure 1: *Buttjes: Language teaching is culture teaching (Buttjes, 1990:55-56)*

2.1. Confronting Cultural Content in Textbooks

However, as this paper has already observed, the type of Western cultural content encountered in classroom teaching materials, such as textbooks, may not be commensurate with student interests. Recent authors have criticized textbooks for their inherent social and cultural biases (Litz, 2002:6), being reflective of an elitist, circumscribed approach, whilst the cultural themes contained in these books may not be scaffolded sufficiently for students to be able to become fully engaged. For example, the textbook 'Headway' devotes pages to classical Western cultural figures such as Dickens and Austin (Soars, 2005:29), whilst 'English File' focuses on Shakespeare (Oxenden, 2001:112). Hedge maintains that the British Royal family appears to be a popular topic with British EFL writers" (Hedge et al, 1997:55), and the British Headway textbook features articles on Princess Diana (Oxenden, 2005:39) and London (2005:119). Hedge claims that "EFL textbook writers, like everyone else, think and compose chiefly through culture-specific schemas" (Hedge et al, 1997:56). These schemas, or schemes of perception, defined by Fowler as "people's perceptions and interpretations of language" (Fowler, 1991:60) ensure that Western culture permeates ELT textbook design and classroom practice. Widdowson, however, notes that students process cultural information according to "the schematic knowledge associated with their mother tongue" (Widdowson, 1990:110), and this runs the risk that they may be alienated or confused by the content of many English textbooks, as such content may not be congruent with their own socially acculturated schematic knowledge.

ELT textbooks can also be understood as serving to legitimise the economic process of globalisation. Gray claims that "in paving the ground for the development of markets favourable to the U.K, the timely provision of ELT textbooks was identified as a strategic initial move" (Gray,

2010:716). Others argue that the global educational sector is pervaded by the business ideology of powerful multinational companies, and Bello explains how brand names such as “Coca-Cola, Pepsi, McDonalds, Burger King and Procter & Gamble are also directly involved in developing curricula for schools along with advertising promotions to help kids grow up corporate” (Bello, 2001:133). Textbooks are an important part of this corporate process, legitimising the brands and products featured within as the inevitable norm. The EFL textbook ‘English File’ employs market centred language which refers to McDonalds as having “fundamentally changed human behaviour in every country” (Oxenden et al, 2001:108/9). English students are encouraged to believe in the legitimacy of this, and are tacitly led to consider themselves, for good or ill, as having been “McColonised” (Oxenden et al, 2001:108). The same textbook also features an exercise on McDonalds, with requires students to employ business English, such as “competitor” “market” “quality” and “value” to assess its virtues as a product (2001:108). Similarly, in Japan, the textbook ‘Cutting Edge’ features a reading exercise focused on the world’s most popular brands, such as Coca-Cola, Rolex, Nokia, Samsung, Mercedes and KFC (Cunningham, et al, 2005: 107). In a chapter of the textbook titled ‘Got to have it!’ (2005:106) a gap fill exercise requires students to add verb forms to an incomplete passage of the text featuring Nike shoes (2005:109). Textbooks can be seen to legitimise and brand vocational roles in society. Gray holds that, in the neo-liberal climate, individuals are encouraged to brand themselves to stand out, and that textbooks accentuate this process by featuring the world of work as “a privileged means for the full and intense realization of the self “ (Gray, 2010:714). His qualitative analysis of a selection of textbooks highlights the high number of work related units featured. For example, New Headway Upper-Intermediate, 2005, contains 12 chapters, 4 of which feature work as a major theme (Gray, 2010:721). Gray suggests that this illustrates “a ‘Brand You’ perspective and, in general, a celebratory view of the world of work as a means to personal fulfilment” (2010:721). Whilst most texts equate global corporate processes with choice and emancipation, they arguably ignore the economic, political and social problems that underlie students’ educational needs. Tollefson observes that “classes like modernization processes generally, operate with an illusion of progress that may help to sustain unequal social relationships” (Tollefson, 1991:101).

2.2. Developing a Critical Approach Towards Cultural Content

Many ELT textbooks are culturally and ideologically saturated with Western brand imagery and vocational stereotypes, which may fail to stimulate students, or simply confuse them, due to this cultural content being incongruent with their own socially acculturated schematic knowledge. This may in turn lead to student interest in the lesson topics dwindling, with class motivational levels dropping. However, individual teachers in the field are often in no position to combat this problem,

having no choice at all in selecting the textbook they may use (Flavell, 1994:48). To fully engage students Byram advocates teachers addressing themes and culture in English textbooks through a critical approach, maintaining that “themes e.g. food, homes, school, tourism, leisure can receive a similarly critical perspective” (Byram, et al, 2002:16). Through scaffolding specific vocabulary and then applying it to a number of themes Byram maintains that oversimplified or brand specific textbooks can be opened up, continuing “the theme of sport can be examined from many perspectives, including...gender, age, religion, racism” (16). This type of critical language teaching pedagogy aims to equip learners with a valuable set of conceptual thinking tools, from which they can engage with English in a far more dynamic fashion and Bryam asserts that this critical approach “would also avoid students perceiving the West or themselves through the prism of corporate branding and vocational stereotypes” (5). Therefore, whilst teachers are often placed in educational paradigms where they are mandated materials, a skilful teacher, even when saddled with a poorly designed or inauthentic textbook, can find a way to pursue a critical approach to content. Within the Japanese university classroom dynamic this can be pursued through the use of carefully chosen audio visual materials which are employed alongside specifically tailored vocabulary handouts, and which can be utilized in tandem with compulsory textbooks.

3. Employing Audio-Visual Materials to Teach Content

Employing audio-visual media to scaffold students’ comprehension of class content can have great merits, and Lonergan notes that the first of these is authenticity, which will appeal to learners because “learners are quite familiar with television from their own domestic situations” (Lonergan, 1995:80). Visual materials that convey local or international cultural subjects of interest can be used to engage students, helping learners to “predict information, infer ideas, and analyze the world that is brought into the classroom” (Canning-Wilson, 2000:3). Harmer notes that “in real life people read or listen to language because they want to and because they have a purpose for doing so” (Schackne:2002:4), and Japanese university students must also have a reason for use before they become fully engaged in using English in the classroom. Schackne claims that students develop a desire to know more through initial exposure to a subject of a piece of information that they are already interested in, and that the teacher should spend time generating interest in the introductory part of the exercise, claiming that “interest leads to prediction, prediction based on expectation, and this in turn creates a purpose...to confirm or deny predictions and expectations” (Schackne:2002:5). Therefore videos should be used in the classroom to give students a reason for engaging with the language and cultural content, whilst carefully selecting specific audio-visual materials that suit the student level of interest would also prove to be advantageous. Canning-

Wilson's research study illustrated that learners expressed a preference for action/entertainment films in the language classroom, (2000) indicating that these particular audio visual materials could be employed successfully as a significant classroom motivational tool. Moreover, movies and TV entertainment provide authentic cultural and language input (Cakir, 2006:68), showing the students how people behave in the culture whose language they are learning. However, if these types of audio-visual media are to be employed by teachers, an approach which encourages learners to engage with the material critically rather than passively should be considered important. Therefore, such entertainment based media may be used as a springboard towards more critical channels of thought that confront authentic issues students can identify with. The main priority of audio visual use should be to engender an active response from students, and Canning-Wilson notes that videos can best be employed by fostering "great mental effort for active listening instead of passive retrieval" (Canning-Wilson, 2000:5).

3.1. Disadvantages in Audio-Visual Usage

In order for students to approach Western centred themes, and branded, vocational or oversimplified topics more critically, it is important to employ audio visual materials carefully and judiciously. It is therefore crucial that teachers do not employ these materials cynically as a means to cheaply and easily entertain their students whilst filling up class time, and Lonergan observes that video materials are "not meant to rival or overshadow the teacher, still less replace him or her" (Lonergan, 1995:5). It is also important that teachers do not subject students to constant visual stimuli in the classroom, as empirical evidence has shown that attention spans are lowered when watching long sections of videos. For example, Balatova conducted research which found that video scenes which were relatively shorter were considered by students easier to understand (Canning-Wilson, 2000:1), whilst also noting that "by the end of four minutes, distraction spread all over the groups" (4). Subjecting students to lengthy audio-visual exposure without a clear purpose will more likely decrease learner attention spans and hasten dwindling motivation. More seriously, overexposure to visual stimuli has been shown to engender passivity rather than activity, and theorists working outside of EFL such as Thompson & Chrisakis (2005) and Sigman (2007) have illustrated through research how extensive screen exposure can negatively affect L1 speaker attention spans, cognition and memory. Videos should therefore be employed discretely, for short, concentrated periods of class time, (Canning-Wilson, 2000:4) in which learners should be actively engaged (Lonergan, 1995:6) and should be integrated with other activities for the purpose of vocabulary or cultural comprehension.

4. Background to a Content and Language Integrated Course

This researcher undertook research during the course of the 2011 academic year to attempt to determine the effectiveness of employing visual materials to scaffold student critical comprehension of content. This research was conducted in a compulsory communicative English class containing 18 students at a private university in Japan, where audio-visual media were employed selectively in tandem with a university mandated textbook. It was hoped that this approach would help engage students more dynamically and actively in relation to the foreign cultural content contained in the texts. Whilst a specific amount of class time had to be allocated to the teaching of textbook centred activities, some other time was available for the pursuit of audio-visual activities. Therefore, although the main goal of the course was to improve student communicative ability, in order to fully achieve this it was considered important to interpolate a critical and cognitive approach towards culture. This approach was informed by a Content and Language Integrated Learning Approach (CLIL), a methodology that aims to integrate the teaching of content with language teaching goals (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010) and which advocates the teaching of the 4Cs as being of equal importance. The 4Cs (see Figure 2 below) integrate four contextualized building blocks: content (subject matter), communication (language learning and using) cognition (learning and thinking processes) and culture (developing intercultural understanding), predicating equal importance upon the teaching of all four skills. Within the CLIL structure, students are encouraged to apply a critical and comparative intercultural approach to foreign content through a discretely integrated program of vocabulary.

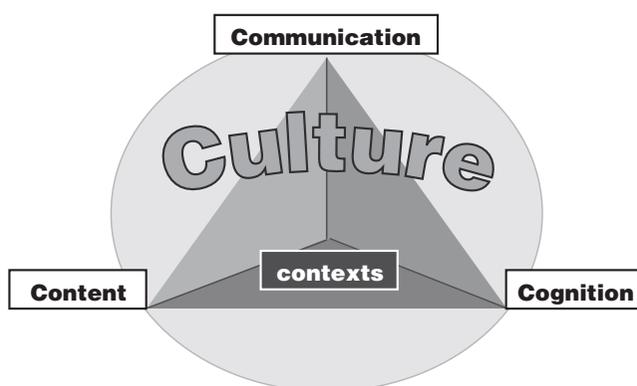


Figure 2: *The 4 Cs Framework (Coyle, Hood, Marsh, 2010).*

5. Topics in the Curriculum

The course was designed around the compulsory class textbook *Topic Talk Issues* (McLean, 2009), a low- intermediate level speaking and listening text, which integrated vocabulary based practice of all four language skills to aid the completion of speaking and discussion activities. The chapters of the textbook were arranged in terms of topic and theme, ensuring that complimentary content specific audio-visual materials and handouts could be interpolated successfully and easily with the text. Each topic was taught over two classes, and whilst the textbook was used in the first class, the teacher created handouts and video selections were used in the second. These content specific media were chiefly chosen to extend and deepen the topics contained in the textbook, so that the students could approach these cultural themes in a deeper, more critical fashion. Content specific vocabulary was introduced and scaffolded, and a focus on discussion was targeted so that students would move towards offering opinions in a more natural way. Table 1. (below) lists a sample of the textbook topics, and the extended audio-visual based topics, which were employed over the two semesters.

Semester One (Spring/Summer 2011)	Semester Two (Autumn/Winter 2011/12)
Class 1 - Textbook Topic: Fashion Choices Class 2 - Extended Topic: Cicero, Ralph Nader & Personal vs. Civic Freedom of Choice	Class 1 - Textbook Topic: Shopping Class 2 - Extended Topic: Sigmund Freud, the Unconscious Mind & Brand Advertising
Class 1 - Textbook Topic: Culture Class 2 - Extended Topic: Edward Said, National Stereotypes & Orientalism	Class 1 - Textbook Topic: TV and Movies Class 2 - Extended Topic: Stuart Hall – Media Re-Presentation, Encoding and Decoding
Class 1 - Textbook Topic: Love & Marriage Class 2 - Extended Topic: Mary Wollstonecraft, Naomi Wolf & Feminism	Class 1 - Textbook Topic: Nature Class 2 - Extended Topic: James Hansen, Global Warming & Global Pollution

Table 1: *Sample of Topics in the curriculum.*

6. Teaching Approaches

The course was distinguished by a focus upon specific activities such as tailored vocabulary and multimedia which were used to deepen the topic and themes studied in the course textbook.

6.1. Use of Audio Visual Materials

Visual materials were employed to teach the four Cs of Content, Cognition, Culture and Communication. During these content specific activities all four language skills, such as writing, reading, listening and speaking, were used by the students, whilst critical thinking skills were also encouraged. A laptop with Wi-Fi connection was connected to the classroom projector and used in class to access the Web 2.0 site You-Tube. Students are imbibing Western audio-visual culture in their daily lives through a growing access to Internet Web 2.0 devices such as You-Tube (Richardson, 2005:8), and this has led Nordin and Ahmad to advocate the use of a see hear approach which incorporates the use of multimedia in the classroom, such as “computer graphics, images, audio, integration of texts, video and digital environment” (2010:239) As students were already familiar with Web 2.0 resources such as You-Tube, it was felt that utilizing this in class would prove popular and serve to engage students. Moreover, due to the vast quantity of information available on this website, the teacher was able to easily locate short video examples which complimented thematic exercises found in the textbook. Canning-Wilson notes that videos used in class “should be shown in segments and not as a whole” (Canning-Wilson, 2000:4) to “exploit the macro-listening skills and the micro-listening skills” (4), and the short segmented framework of the videos uploaded onto You-Tube meant that it was well suited to the exigencies of the class for the purpose of brevity. Videos were researched thoroughly and bookmarked before the classes, in order to avoid wasting precious teaching time searching for materials. Whilst segments should be short, choosing categories and selections of material which would be commensurate with the students’ interests was also deemed crucial. Lonergan divides audio-visual materials into 5 broad categories, illustrated in Figure 3. (below).

1) Video recordings of language-teaching broadcasts and films.
2) Video recordings of domestic television broadcasts, such as comedy programs and news programs.
3) Video recordings of specialist films and television programs, such as documentaries or educational programs.
4) Video language-teaching materials made for the classroom rather than for public transmission as broadcasts.
5) Self made video films, involving the teachers and learners.

Figure 3: *Categories of Audio-Visual Materials (Lonergan, 1995:7)*

As one of the main aims of the class was to scaffold a deeper understanding of authentic cultural content, selections of material from category No2 and, in some cases, No3 were considered

most applicable to the needs of the class. Rogers and Medley (1988) argue that the criteria for identifying the authenticity of materials should include the quality, appropriateness and naturalness of the language, and Loneragan outlines video recordings of domestic television broadcasts as “real and meaningful; and they have a relevance to the learner” (Loneragan, 1995:8).

Therefore, You-Tube was employed to show pre-selected short segments of TV shows, news clips, movie trailers and advertisements, as selections from these categories were felt to contain naturalness of language, and suit the criteria of authenticity. For showing selected clips from movies which were unavailable on You-Tube, a classroom DVD player was used. Whilst suiting the purpose outlined by Loneragan (5), these video clips were also believed to suit the mean level of student interest. However, Cakir notes that methodologically speaking, watching video films should be different from passive television viewing (Cakir, 2006:71). Therefore, vocabulary and teacher created handouts were also employed that would encourage and scaffold an active, critical response to the material.

6.2 Use of Vocabulary Sheets and Handouts

Cakir notes that in order to encourage learners to engage with authentic audio-visual materials actively, it is important to use supplementary materials, such as worksheets prepared by the teacher and supplied with the videos (Cakir, 2006:71). Whilst the textbook introduced a step-by-step vocabulary framework for general fluency purposes, vocabulary to aid a critical approach towards audio visual cultural content was also introduced by the teacher. This study was informed by the work of Byram, who advocates the use of specially scaffolded vocabulary to help learners understand cultural issues, and talk about cultural diversity. This can include words such as “human rights; equality; dignity; gender; bias; prejudice; stereotype; racism; ethnic minority” (Bryram et al, 2001:16). Authentic video materials were used to teach a cultural appreciation of content, and were scaffolded in tandem with teacher created handouts. These handouts took the form of vocabulary sheets, gap fills, word searches and reading handouts, being tailored to the mean student level of comprehension.

7. Cultural Content Taught Critically in the Class

Whilst videos and handouts were used to improve student stimulation, these media were also employed to scaffold theoretical pedagogic materials which were chosen to give students a deeper understanding of the cultural content found in the textbooks. Two specific example of this approach will be given below: critically evaluating corporate brand advertisements and critically evaluating movie and TV news styles.

7.1. Critically Evaluating Corporate Brand Advertisements

Class 1 focused on studying the vocabulary and topics contained within Unit 8 of the textbook Topic Talk Issues (McLean, 2011:57-64), and the students discussed general themes related to shopping preferences and commercials. For Class 2, however, the teacher sought to scaffold a more critical appreciation of advertisements through an analysis of style and content. This was achieved by introducing the students to the ideas of psychologist Sigmund Freud (2010), and by attempting to scaffold his theory of the conscious and unconscious mind, id and ego, whilst illustrating how these ideas were then employed in advertising by public relations expert Edward Bernays (Jones, 1999). It was hoped that by showing specific You-Tube video examples of commercials, it would be possible to illustrate how these ideas are used in modern advertising to sell products. Following on from the themes discussed in the textbook, students were asked to discuss recent popular advertisements and catchphrases. Following this, students were shown three commercials for popular drinks and the class was required to quickly note down on paper any significant actions, language exchanges and catchphrases that caught their eye. The length of the advertisements were short enough for students to be able to quickly note various details, and Lonergan notes that commercials are perfect for such exercises due to the conciseness of the medium (Lonergan, 1995:86). New sets of vocabulary were then introduced to help students place the advertisements into specific categories, such as comedy, fantasy, celebrity endorsement, bandwagon, and statistics. Students were required to undertake a communicative discussion, and were placed into groups where they were required to employ their scripted notes. Norris recommends this approach for aiding students make the transition from formal speechmaking to more spontaneous discussion, observing that students should first “refer to pre-prepared scripts when discussing an assigned topic” (Norris, 1996:4). However, after a few changes of partners “the scripts are put away and the students have to rely on memory and imagination” (4). Therefore the students first employed their notes alongside the scaffolded vocabulary to compare with their partners the three different advertisements, being gradually encouraged to discuss these advertisements without using their notes, whilst describing which they liked best and least.

Students were next shown a TGI Fridays advertisement featuring the animated character Homer Simpson (TGI Fridays, 2008), in which his commercial choices are influenced by his television. The concept of brainwashing was introduced, and students were invited to discuss whether an advertisement had ever influenced them when buying a product. The difference between the words need and want were then illustrated by the teacher, and the students were then invited in pairs to brainstorm and list things that they needed in their lives, and things that they wanted, whilst also discussing the differences between them. An illustrated reading handout containing cartoon

images of Sigmund Freud's conscious and unconscious mind, ego and id, was then introduced and distributed, and the students were required to connect these simplified pictorial concepts to the things they had earlier identified as needing and wanting. Next the class was handed a short gap fill exercise, recycling the vocabulary from the previous Freud handout, which illustrated how Freud's theories were employed in commercials by his nephew Edward Bernays to target customer wants and unconscious desires. This handout also contained a photographic example of Bernays' pioneering advertisement for cigarettes, in which he attempted to target specific women's groups, such as the Suffragettes. Students were then required to once again watch a series of commercials, whilst attempting to note down any significant action or language exchange, before being placed into groups and required to use the details they had recorded to discuss whether these commercials targeted the conscious or unconscious mind. For example, students were shown two different examples of Gillette commercials (Gillette 1955 Commercial, 2009, and Gillette 1996 Commercial, 2006). Whilst the more recent commercial placed emphasis on imagery such as fast cars and beautiful women, the older commercial centred its focus purely on the razor's functionality as a shaving device. Finally, students were required to discuss whether the Japanese advertising industry sells them things they need or things they want, and were asked to brainstorm potential good points and bad points regarding this.

7.2. Critically Evaluating Movie and TV News Styles

Class 1 focused on studying the vocabulary and topics contained within Unit 10 of the textbook *Topic Talk Issues* (McLean, 2011:73 -80), and the students discussed general themes related to TV and movie preferences. For Class 2, however, the teacher once again sought to scaffold a more critical appreciation of these media through an analysis of style. This was achieved by introducing the students to the ideas of the media theorist Stewart Hall (1980) and by attempting to explicate his theories of re-presentation, encoding and decoding, whilst illustrating specific You-Tube video examples of how the western news media subtly re-presents the news content it presents. The use of such off-air news recordings meant that media studies could become part of the subject matter of the lesson (Lonergan, 1995:81). The second class commenced by continuing with the subject of movie preferences, but students were now encouraged to evaluate different types and styles of movies through newly introduced categories of vocabulary. Students were shown a series of movie trailers, and were required to evaluate them in a writing activity whilst using scaffolded vocabulary such as lighting, camera angle, sound effects, music, computer generated images, special effects, plot, setting, character, and actor facial expressions and voice intonation. Lonergan notes that it is usually difficult for learners to undertake extensive writing tasks while watching the screen (Lonergan, 1995:11), so students were only asked to write their ideas in quick vocabulary note form

after each viewing. Students then employed these collected vocabulary notes in a group activity where they compared and contrasted each trailer and discussed their preferences. However, as the students changed partners they were encouraged to try and talk more without using their notes, using, as Norris argues “memory and imagination” (Norris, 1996:4).

The focus of the class then shifted subtly towards discussing the TV news media, but whilst still utilizing the same vocabulary. Two students were selected to participate in a scripted argument regarding which film trailer was best, whilst other student reactions towards the event were elicited and placed on the board. The teacher then undertook a mock news presentation of the event, in which introductory music, a short video, and intonation and facial gestures were employed. Student reactions to this news presentation of the event were again elicited and placed on the board. The students then discussed the differences between the earlier event, and the latter teacher presentation, in which the news was encoded with music and gestures. The class was then advised that the teacher presentation was a media re-presentation of the earlier argument that they had witnessed, whilst their different reactions to the two events were their individual decodings. Having scaffolded these concepts, such as re-presentation, encoding and decoding, the teacher then handed the students a short and simplified reading sheet which outlined the ideas of Stewart Hall, and they were required to complete a gap fill vocabulary exercise. Subsequently, a selection of You-Tube television news examples were shown, and students in groups had to use movie vocabulary such as lighting, camera angle, sound effects, music, computer generated images (CGI), and special effects to describe and identify which types of film technique, or encoding, were being employed by the TV news. The focus of the class then narrowed to concentrate on specific encoding examples employed by the TV news media, such as voice inflection and facial gestures. Following a quick review of the kinds of voice inflection and facial gestures employed in movies, students were then required to watch a You-Tube video of a BBC newscast (BBC Weekend News with Mishal Hussien, 2009) whilst studying a short transcript of the newsreader’s speech. The students viewed the very short broadcast approximately three times and were encouraged to circle encoded words where the newsreader inflected her voice or used rhetorical gestures. Cakir notes that “facial expressions or hand gestures provide aural clues of intonation” (Cakir, 2006:71), and students discussed in groups which words were enunciated rhetorically and emphasized with facial gestures. It was found that the newsreader narrowed her eyes when reading the word scrutiny, which the students felt connoted mystery and complexity, and widened her eyes when reading words such as fears and risk, which the students felt connoted surprise and drama. In addition to this, the newscaster used stressed intonation whilst reading these words. Lonergan notes that “paralinguistic features, such as gesture and...intonation patterns, often lend a meaning to something spoken which cannot be guessed at by seeing the

words” (Lonergan, 1995:35). This exercise proved dually useful; it aided student comprehension of the words on the transcript, whilst also allowing students to observe how these meanings were emphasized and exaggerated by the newscaster’s paralinguistic features. A short conversation was then orchestrated by the teacher, in which students discussed whether the kinds of techniques employed by the TV news were similar to the types of techniques they had seen in the earlier movie trailers, and whether this media re-presentation potentially compromised objective news reporting. Finally, the students were asked to consider whether the same techniques are employed by the Japanese news media or not, and what the good points or bad points of this could be.

8. Course Evaluation and Assessment

In order to evaluate the general success of this classroom approach towards scaffolding a critical comprehension of culture, some statistical research was undertaken. This research incorporated distributing a jointly quantitative and qualitative student response questionnaire, whilst also undertaking a comparative examination of student textbook vocabulary results and audio-visual related vocabulary results.

8.1. Questionnaire Methodology

Quantitative questionnaires were given to a total of 18 students in the final class of the semester. Students were asked not to write their names on the paper and were instructed to place the sheets in an envelope before leaving the classroom. It was hoped that by measuring the students’ attitudes towards these media, and comparing their response towards the course textbook, an overall barometer of the effectiveness of the materials used could be established. For the first 10 questions, the author decided to employ a Likert-style response option system: a style which commonly contains five response options, but which has also been used with fewer than two and up to seven responses (Dornyei, 2010, p.28). The 11 questions were divided into three sections: course textbook, and course videos, which contained closed questions (see Table 2.below) and student self assessment, which contained a single qualitative question (see Table3. below) relating to whether the course had aided their ability to think critically about cultural ideas. A Likert-type scale for the 10 closed questions in the questionnaire was designed so that students would give a clear positive or negative choice from the four choices. Students could therefore answer with a strong or mild positive or negative response. One example question is given below in Figure 4.

What was your opinion of the video clips used?
a) interesting b) okay c) uninteresting d) boring

Figure 4: Example close-ended question from the questionnaire:

In the above example, interesting was assigned a score of 4 points and *okay* a score of 3. These were the two 'positive' responses. *Uninteresting* was given a score of 2, and boring a score of 1. These were the two negative responses. Participants who chose a 4 point response for each question would score a maximum of 40 points.

8.2 Questionnaire Findings

It was decided that scoring student attitudes towards the textbook and towards the audio-visual conveyed content within the same questionnaire would afford a useful comparative barometer of the two teaching mediums. Therefore, 4 of the questions concern the effectiveness of the textbook, whilst the next 4 use exactly the same criteria to compare the students' responses to the audio-visual materials employed. Furthermore, the additional 2 questions relate specifically to the use of audio-visual materials for writing and vocabulary acquisition. The results of these 10 closed questions are given in Table 2 (below). They highlight the mean score, the standard deviation score (SD) and the range of each answer. As shown in Table 2 the students overall opinion rating of the textbook was fairly strong 3.33, whilst responses to textbook questions 2 (3.22) and 4 (3.38) were also quite satisfactory. However, when asked whether they would like to see the textbook used in class more often, the students gave a fairly negative mean rating of 2.66, which was the lowest overall rating contained within the response data. In direct comparison, the class videos rated far more highly with students. The students overall opinion rating of the class videos was a very strong 3.94 in comparison to the 3.22 textbook score, whilst responses to questions 6 (Did the video clips make you want to talk with your fellow students?) and 7 (Would you like to see video clips used in class more often?) both scored a mean total of 3.66, illustrating their worth as a means of engaging students in communication. The students also responded positively toward the video materials as a stimulus for writing, awarding question 9 a rating of 3.44. However, this data was tempered by the low response to question number 10 (2.88), which questioned the use of videos for improving vocabulary. The low student response rating therefore indicated a lack of confidence among students in the use of audio-visual materials for vocabulary acquisition. Nevertheless, when asked how the videos and the textbook had helped their understanding of cultural ideas the students awarded the audio-visual materials a highly pleasing rating of 3.88 against 3.38 for the textbook, illustrating that the cultural content conveyed by the audio-visual materials was comprehensible to almost everyone in the class, and fulfilling one of the central aims of the project.

Course Textbook and Video Questions:	Mean	SD	Range
1) What was your opinion of the course textbook? a) interesting b) okay c) uninteresting d) boring Answer: Interesting.	3.33	0.67	2
2) Did the course textbook subjects make you want to talk with your fellow students? a) Yes, definitely b) yes, a little c) not really d) definitely not Answer: Yes, a little.	3.22	0.64	3
3) Would you like to see the course textbook used in class more often? a) Yes, definitely b) yes, a little c) not really d) definitely not Answer: Yes, a little.	2.66	0.54	3
4) How did the course textbook help your understanding of cultural ideas introduced during the course? a) very useful b) useful c) a little useful d) not useful Answer: Useful.	3.38	0.68	2
5) What was your opinion of the video clips used? a) interesting b) okay c) uninteresting d) boring Answer: Interesting.	3.94	0.88	1
6) Did the video clips make you want to talk with your fellow students? a) Yes, definitely b) yes, a little c) not really d) definitely not Answer: Yes, definitely.	3.66	0.78	1
7) Would you like to see video clips used in class more often? a) Yes, definitely b) yes, a little c) not really d) definitely not Answer: Yes, definitely	3.66	0.78	2
8) How did the use of videos in class help your understanding of cultural ideas introduced during the course? a) very useful b) useful c) a little useful d) not useful Answer: Very useful.	3.88	0.86	1
9) Did the video clips make you want to write more? a) Yes, definitely b) yes, a little c) not really d) definitely not Answer: Yes definitely.	3.44	0.70	2
10) How useful were the class videos for improving vocabulary? a) very useful b) useful c) a little useful d) not useful Answer: Useful.	2.88	0.57	3

Table 2: *Final Mean Ratings of Students' Responses towards the Course.*

Whilst the first 10 questions were closed, number 11 was an open, qualitative question, and required student self- assessment in relation to whether their ability to think critically about cultural ideas

had improved during the course. A pleasing 77% said that their ability to think more critically about cultural ideas had improved, whilst 23% said that it had not improved (See Table 3.below).

Student Self Assessment Pie Chart

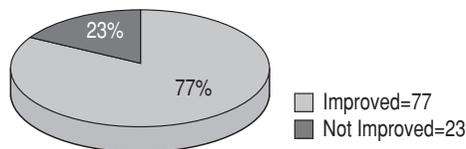


Table 3: *Question 11 – Student Self Assessment Response Data.*

Whilst 77% of the class felt that they had improved, these students were then asked to qualitatively explain why, and a range of different answers were given. The most frequently occurring responses have been collected together and are presented below in Table 4. These responses include teacher explanations, class handouts, class activities, and videos. It should be noted that several of the students gave two or more reasons in their written comments.

Teacher Explanations: 72.2
Class Handouts: 44.4
Class Activities: 22.2
Class Videos: 77.7
Class Textbook: 1.6%

Table 4: *Question 11 – Reason for Improvement Response Data*

Therefore, when asked why they thought that their ability to think about cultural ideas had improved, 77.7% of the students attributed this to the use of class videos, once more illustrating the popularity of the medium. Whilst teacher explanations were also rated positively, handouts and activities were rated lower, whilst the class textbook scored a very weak 1.6%.

8.3. Vocabulary Testing

Over the course of the academic year two vocabulary exams were mandated, one per semester, which tested the students on their comprehension of course vocabulary. This encompassed testing both their textbook vocabulary and content related vocabulary. The first test was given in July 2011 to 18 students, whilst the second was administered in January 2012. Each exam tested the students on 50 pieces of vocabulary, encompassing 25 words taught from the course textbook, and 25 words taught in conjunction with the audio-visual materials and teacher created handouts. Both tests were multiple choice in format and required that students chose one correct definition out

of 4 options. This exam data allowed the teacher to check and compare the overall mean level of comprehension for both sets of vocabulary. Students achieved an overall mean score of 75% for the textbook related vocabulary, whilst achieving an overall mean score of 72% for the content related vocabulary. This data suggests that the students had acquired content specific vocabulary and phrases less successfully than they had acquired the textbook specific vocabulary.

Textbook Mean Score	75%
Content Materials Mean Score	72%

Table 5: *Student Textbook and Content Specific Vocabulary Results*

8.4. Vocabulary Findings

The results of the vocabulary tests indicate that student acquisition of audio-visual content related vocabulary scored slightly less highly than textbook vocabulary. Whilst there exist a number of possible reasons why this may be the case, one of the advantages that the textbook held over the media content was that it was compulsory, and easily accessed for revision purposes. Despite being advised to retain their handouts and notes for the examination, many students admitted to not doing so, meaning that their chief source of test revision material was the textbook. Furthermore, as this audio-visual approach was employed within the context of a communicative English class, where the focus was centred chiefly on the teaching of grammar and language skills, it was frequently necessary to give priority to the textbook instead of the audio-visual content. Culturally thematic video classes were thus taught intermittently, as and when gaps in the syllabus afforded opportunities to broaden and extend cultural topics, with less class time available to recycle and reinforce vocabulary compared to the vocabulary being taught in the book.

9. Conclusion

The questionnaire results indicate that videos can be employed in the language classroom in short bursts to stimulate student participation in speaking (Table 2: 3.66) and writing activities (Table 2 : 3.44), aid student understanding of content specific cultural ideas, whilst also serving the students (Table 4: 77.7%) as a way of improving their critically thinking about cultural content. However, whilst audio-visual materials may be employed as a fruitful method of stimulating students' motivational levels, and scaffolding cultural awareness, one notable set of findings from this study observed that student textbook vocabulary scores (Table 5: 75%) were slightly higher than audio-visual content related vocabulary scores (Table 5: 72%). Therefore despite response data strongly

illustrating student preferences for increasing video usage in the language classroom (Table 2: 3.66) over increasing textbook usage (Table 2: 2.66), the vocabulary examination scores seem to indicate the continuing worth of a course textbook in a communicative English class where language learning is the primary focus. Furthermore, response data indicated (Table 2: 2.88) that the students didn't feel that the audio-visual materials had significantly aided vocabulary acquisition. Indeed, there is still little empirical data and research to support the proposition that video facilitates the learning of foreign languages, and Canning-Wilson adds the caveat that "research is warranted to show how audio-visual aids enhance the language learning process" (Canning-Wilson, 2000:1). In relation to the exigencies of a communicative English class, this indicates the value of an integrated approach which employs audio-visual materials to stimulate interest in themes and ideas, whilst the textbook is then utilized to systematically build and reinforce vocabulary. In such an approach, as the data in this study has shown, it is necessary for both audio-visual materials and the textbook to be thematically congruent, so that the attention and communicative stimulation engendered by the former can be captured and transformed into systematic language learning by the latter. However, in other class contexts, such as a discussion, debate or content specific class, where audio-visual materials are not used solely for the purpose of language acquisition, this paper has attempted to show that they can be employed reasonably successfully as a means of facilitating the goals of cultural awareness and criticism of content. To more accurately assess the worth of audio-visual materials in these contexts, it would be necessary to carefully develop a textbook free content specific curriculum in which video materials and vocabulary handouts are scaffolded and continually recycle language. A more rigorously developed, enforced and tested vocabulary program interpolated within the context of a content based curriculum would afford the opportunity to measure the effectiveness of these media for the acquisition of cultural competence.

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Course Materials Questionnaire

The Course Textbook

1) What was your opinion of the course textbook?

- a) interesting b) okay c) uninteresting d) boring

2) Did the course textbook subjects make you want to talk with your fellow students?

- a) Yes definitely b) yes, a little c) not really d) definitely not

3) Would you like to see the course textbook used in class more often?

- a) Yes definitely b) yes, a little c) not really d) definitely not

4) How did the course textbook help your understanding of cultural ideas?

- a) very useful b) useful c) a little useful d) not useful

The Course Videos

5) What was your opinion of the video clips used?

- a) interesting b) okay c) uninteresting d) boring

6) Did the video clips make you want to talk with your fellow students?

- a) Yes definitely b) yes, a little c) not really d) definitely not

7) Would you like to see video clips used in class more often?

- a) Yes definitely b) yes, a little c) not really d) definitely not

8) How did the use of videos in class help your understanding of cultural ideas?

- a) very useful b) useful c) a little useful d) not useful

9) Did the video clips make you want to write more?

- a) Yes definitely b) yes, a little c) not really d) definitely not

10) How useful were the class videos for improving vocabulary?

- a) very useful b) useful c) a little useful d) not useful

Student Self Assessment

11) My ability to think more critically about Western culture has improved/not improved.

Please circle improved or not improved, and if possible give comments why.