

The Use of Actual TV Shows

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When people learn a language, they need to learn not only the grammar but also how to build their confidence in listening to and reading extensive stretches of that language. Getting students used to real-time listening can be done with the use of authentic materials from the country whose language is being studied. There are also cross-cultural, language-building and motivational aspects to this: for example, the use of an American TV show, *Family Ties*, not only shows certain aspects of American culture but also can help to build the students' English ability.

Therefore, I would like to explain specifically how a video of this program can be integrated into a listening class.

Aims of the lesson

The biggest aim of the lesson is to get the students to use the English that they have learned in a medium that they enjoy. All English classes try to build on what the students have done before, but some of today's students could be called integratively motivated learners who enjoy the films and music of other cultures. That is why, using an actual T.V. show starring a well known actor, Michael J. Fox; it is hoped, that this will hold the students' interest and encourage them to want to learn English in an enjoyable way.

The students can also see how a conversation moves from one person to another and how non-verbal cues are important in understanding what a person is saying, as well as how common, non-verbal cues differ across Japanese and American cultures. These are two things all Japanese students have a hard doing in their conversations. Therefore, the video gives the students good examples as to how people talk to each other in daily conversation.

A second aim of the video is to help the students improve their vocabulary by listening to it in context. A video showing a typical conversation can give the students a good visual image of the types of vocabulary used in everyday situations.

A third aim is to have the students see English being used in something that looks and sounds like real communication. Japanese students sometimes get so concerned about the grammar that they miss the message. In listening class, the aim is to get them thinking about the information being conveyed and not just each vocabulary word.

The final aim is to introduce some important cultural aspects of an English-speaking country that are different from Japan. This lesson is about the topic of a high school prom, which in America is one of the major social events of high school.

Since this lesson is done in a situational method that the use of video enables, the students can learn about dating customs and the preparations that go into setting up a prom.

The class

The *Family Ties* video is shown once a week during the listening class. Usually each 30-minute T.V. show has been edited before class, which is the most time consuming part of preparation. Each episode should be edited into two or three parts of about four to six minutes each segment. This allows each segment to be shown two or three times in one particular class period, so the students can have several opportunities to listen to each segment. The students are required to bring their own cassette tapes to class, so the lesson can be recorded on them. This way they can study at home to review the day's lesson, so they can give a summary the next week.

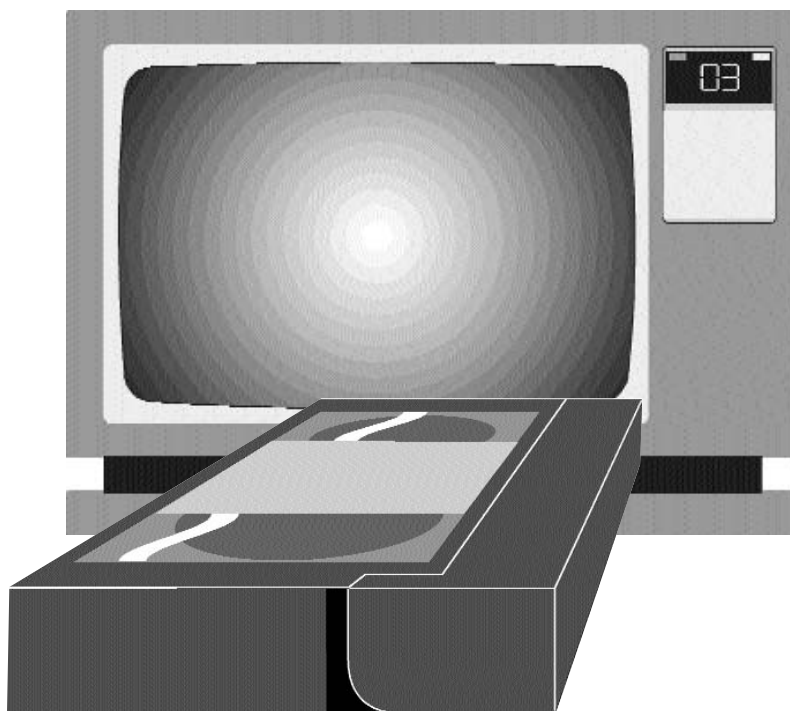
Family Ties

The T.V. show *Family Ties* was a 30-minute American T.V. situation comedy show, in the late 80s. The show is about the Keaton Family, father, mother and their three children. The humor of the show largely revolves around the "liberal" sixties generation parents and their ultra-conservative eighties son (played by popular actor, Michael J. Fox). As is typical of this type of show, the conflict or problem that the episode revolves around is almost always solved in 30 minutes; along the way the audience gets to enjoy a lot of verbal bantering, physical humor, and displays of heart-warming "family values".

Activities

Pre-listening

Each week, eight to 10 vocabulary words are given at the end of class for the next week. The teacher should try to choose vocabulary that the students will be seeing or using again in future lessons. Pronunciation of the items should also be practiced so the students will recognize the words when they hear them again.



Listening class: Vocabulary check

The first thing we do is review the assigned vocabulary. This usually takes five to eight minutes and is done to make sure that the students have the right definitions and to help students who were absent get caught up for the day's class. We also review the pronunciation, and by doing this we hope it stays fresh in everyone's mind.

The handout - part one: Warm-up questions

After completing the vocabulary words, a handout is given to the students. The first section deals with "Warm-Up Questions". This should take 10 minutes and helps get the students thinking about important events in their own high school days. Since they do not have the custom of the high school graduation prom in Japan, the teacher can ask about what they did do to celebrate their graduation. This kind of focused brainstorming helps to get the students thinking about what they will be seeing in the video. We want the students to be able to compare their high school days to those of American high school students. These questions are gone over quickly since there are no right or wrong answers. The rationale is to get the students thinking about the lesson.

Introduction of the main theme in the video

Since *Family Ties* is a situation comedy or "sit-com" set in American society and culture. In one particular episode we are talking about a high school prom, which is a very important custom and event for youth in the U.S. Therefore, it has to be explained in some detail, so the students can understand what kind of

feelings and shared experiences American high school students have from this event.

The handout - part two: multiple choice questions

After the explanation is finished, the students are given two to three minutes to read the multiple choice questions and look at the four possible answers. This is done so the students will start thinking about what kind of answers they will need to listen for and what events they are going to see. Another advantage of multiple choice questions is they allow the students to follow the flow of the story more easily because they do not have to write out an answer, but only check a letter. This is always a consideration when devising listening tasks that require written responses.

The handout - part three: cloze exercise segment

The final part of the lesson is a one-and-a-half-to-two-minute cloze section. This segment comes right from the video they have just seen. The videotape soundtrack of just the language of the cloze segment is recorded on their cassette tapes to be used for this exercise. Whereas the multiple choice questions stress getting quick answers and understanding the gist of the story, the cloze segment can be used to focus on both vocabulary and grammar items. It is here that the students need to listen carefully to hear exactly what has been said. Every *n*th word (e.g., *n*=7) might be deleted, or you might select target vocabulary or structures. This section should stress the new vocabulary words or important grammar functions that were learned in the video.

The flow of the lesson

The video, which is usually four-to-six minutes long, is shown two or three times to allow the students to catch answers that they may have missed. In between showings of the video, the students are given two or three minutes to listen to their cassette tapes to fill in the cloze segment because of the time required to write down more exact answers in the blanks. On the final showing, the audio portion of the video is completely recorded on the students' tapes so they can take them home to review. Tape scripts are also provided for students who are interested, so they can check the vocabulary or look at the grammar they may not have understood. The students are encouraged to listen these tapes at home because they need to remember the information for the next week.

Evaluation

Usually two grades are given, one for the warm-up questions and a grade for the com-

bined multiple choice and cloze scores. The warm-up grade is given solely on whether the students have tried to answer the questions. Even though the warm-up questions do not have any right or wrong answers, it is amazing how many students will not make an effort to answer them unless some sort of incentive is given. The second grade, for the multiple choice and cloze questions, can be curved to allow for questions that were a little more difficult than expected. Usually there are 24 total points (four warm-up questions, ten multiple-choice questions and ten cloze blanks), so a high score of between 20 and 23 would be “very good”.

The next week

When communicating orally, it is important that we remember and comprehend what is being said so we can respond appropriately. In listening class, where the video usually has two or three segments, the students have to remember what happened in part one in order to better understand what is going to happen in part two. That is why students who are absent must get in touch with the teacher to get the handout they missed and get the tape from their friends. This way they can listen to it at home to get

caught up. This is another reason the lessons are recorded on the students’ tapes—so their friends can borrow it if they are absent.

Getting the students to review their tapes is important because the next week some of the warm-up questions will deal with what happened in the previous video. Perhaps three of the four warm-up questions may deal with what happened in the previous story. I then ask a few students to briefly explain last week’s story to the class. This is a good way to see who has been studying at home; it also helps the students recall some of the events they may have forgotten and allow those who were absent to get caught up.

Conclusion

In this video-based listening lesson, the overall aim is to build the students’ confidence in learning English. This can be accomplished by using an authentic part of an English-speaking culture, a T.V. show, which has been edited into shorter segments that support structured activities and listening tasks appropriate to the students’ level. Success at these exercises along with interesting cultural content, it is hoped that, will motivate and encourage the students in their efforts to learn English.
