

## Teaching Oral English With Video to Japanese Students

### ビデオによる英語会話の指導

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#### Introduction

In recent years, a problem in the teaching of English in Japan has come into particular prominence. The problem is that the majority of the students who have received no less than six years of formal English education at the secondary school cannot actually use the English language in the normal spoken communication. I was amazed by the large number of the high school students who said, "I want to learn English conversation," or "I would like to be able to speak with English-speaking people," when they were asked, "What would you like to study first of all when you start studying in the English department of this college?" on the day of their entrance examination. It seems that the students have a wish to learn how to speak in English, but that the education they received did not give them a chance to learn it.

There are many obstacles in order to develop the speaking skill of the students in the English classes in Japan : (1) the class is too large, (2) the number of hours available for teaching oral practice is a lot limited, and (3) the teachers who are confident enough to teach the spoken language are not many in number. It is very difficult to give effective oral practice under these conditions. This is why it is important to understand the various techniques and procedures to teach the spoken language. They are, in a sense, an attempt to accommodate language learning to the unfavorable environment of the classroom.<sup>1</sup>

There are various equipments and media which help the teacher and the learner to work on oral practice. Among them the video recorder seems to be one of the most potential equipment to promote the speech skill. It exposes the learner to a considerable amount of spoken language and it brings natural, real situations of the outside world into the classroom. Many teachers, however, are still uncertain about how to use it in the class. I have been one of those for long because I have been doubtful if

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there are materials which fit the class work well, and I have thought that it consumes too much time to prepare the video materials for the class, and moreover, I have feared that the "machine" may take over and control the classroom.

A small thing which has happened to my one-year-old daughter, however, has made me reconsider all about the use of the video recorders. My daughter Emma loves to sing songs, and whenever she hears me sing something she cannot sing, she asks me to sing the song again and again, usually about ten times and sometimes more than twenty times. While I am singing, Emma stares at my mouth and tries to move her mouth in the same way, and after a while she suddenly starts singing the song herself. This learning ability of the one-year-old girl has amazed everyone around her, and at the same time, this fact has encouraged me in my English teaching method, that is, if you listen to the model again and again, and try to learn it, you are sure to acquire it. But there has happened an even more amazing thing. One day I heard Emma singing a song which I had never sung for her. I was very surprised and asked her who sang the song. She said, "Telebi no Onee-chan (Girl on TV)." I remembered a girl singing the song in one of Emma's favorite children's TV programs a few days before, which means that Emma learned the song after listening to the song only a couple of times. After that happened, I observed Emma start singing a new song in the same manner several times. It is obvious now that Emma learns songs much more quickly when she listens to them on TV with attractive girls' dancing or colorful animals' animation than when she only listens to me sing. It seems to me that Emma learns the song without any effort when the screen provides her with the visual element of the song as well as the sound.

Now I have started having a strong feeling that adult English learners have to be given an opportunity to learn with the support of such visual aids as television or video materials if it works in the similar way as Emma learns songs, that is, if learning with visual elements on the screen saves the learner much time and trouble to develop his speaking skill.

J. Markson-Brown's experiment shows that proper use of video in the classroom can provide better and probably quicker comprehensible input as regards meaning and understanding of discourse.<sup>2</sup> Now it is hypothesized that video can provide better and quicker development in speaking ability than textbooks, if the material is well produced and if the teacher is competent enough for using it.

## Experiment

The experiment has been made focused on the speaking of Japanese two-year college

students. Although they have studied English for six years in the secondary school and are still studying it at college, they are very deficient in speaking ability. But they have a strong desire to be able to communicate orally in English. The main purpose of this experiment is to find out how the use of video will affect the class and how effective video will be on learning oral English.

(a) **Procedures**

The experiment consisted of the two six-day sessions, each day having one-hour class work. One session was done only with written texts and the teacher's English and no mechanical aid was used. In the other session, video was introduced and the written text was used only as a supplementary material. In both sessions the identical dialogues were used as materials. When about forty students were informed of these intensive speaking sessions during the spring vacation, fourteen women-students applied. Those fourteen students separated into two groups according to which session they wanted to be in, seven of them being in the class with video and the other seven without video.

Each student was given a test at the beginning of the first day of the session. The test was designed to see how much the students could respond when they were talked to in English. In the test the students were to choose one correct answer or expression out of three options when the teacher asked or talked to them. The identical test was to be given on the last day of the session.

Materials to be used in the session were selected very carefully. The students were asked what kind of speaking they wanted to learn before the session started, since it is extremely important from the point of view of motivation that the students participate actively in the lesson. And their primary interest was found to be the very basic oral communicative skill, such as exchanging greetings, showing thanks and apologies, and expressing needs. Eight video series designed for the purpose of oral practice were examined carefully and three series were selected as suitable materials for this experiment. They were It's Your Turn to Speak by Nelson Filmscan Ltd., Your Video Passport by Air Supply Ltd., and Look, Speak and Travel : America by A & V Ltd. These were considered to be suitable for this session because (1) the materials consists of the dialogue, not the prose passage, (2) the language is relevant and appropriate, (3) the situations are realistic, and (4) the structural and lexical items are limited. From the three video series, seventeen one- or two-minute scenes were selected according to the students' interests. Every two or three scenes dealt with the same function (for example, ordering food) but their dialogues were different (for example, ordering breakfast at a coffeeshop and ordering dinner at a restaurant) and where the film of the

scene was made were different (for example, the video film made in a studio setting and that made in the real restaurant including background noise). Materials used during the session are shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
Video Tape Materials Used  
in the Six-Day Video-Used  
Speaking Session

Day	Function	Title	Setting
1	Greetings	Meeting People	At a party, at a bank & at a university
		Meeting at the Station	At a station
		Goodbyes	At a station
2	Ordering food	Breakfast	At a restaurant
		Breakfast	At a coffee shop
		Dinner	At a restaurant
3	Complaint	Wrong Order	At a coffee shop
		Slow Service	At a restaurant
4	Buying tickets	Train	At a ticket window
	Shopping	Shopping	At a jewelry store
		Shopping	At a women's clothes store
5	Direction	Buying Clothes	At a department store
		Asking for Direction	On a street
		Directing a Taxi	In a taxi
6	Telephone	Taking a picture	At a sightseeing place
		Public Phone	In a telephone booth
		Using a Pay Phone	In a telephone booth

Two or three dialogues of the similar situation were presented in every class hour of both groups, but how they were presented and practised in each group was very different. The group without video was conducted like the usual English lesson in Japan : the dialogue was read by the teacher, the students followed the written text and repeated the teacher, and whatever they failed to understand was explained or translated. On the other hand, in the group with video, the students watched and lis-

tened to the scene on video without the written text, and they took the role of one speaker on video and practised speaking with the other speaker on video, only the words very unfamiliar to the students being illustrated or explained by the teacher. The following shows how each dialogue was presented and practised in the two different groups step by step.

	<u>Group without Video</u>	<u>Group with Video</u>
Step 1	The students listen to the dialog read by the teacher without looking at the text.	The students watch the scene on video twice without the written text.
Step 2	The students follow the text while the teacher reads.	The teacher talks to the students like one speaker in the scene and the students try to respond like the other speaker. (Being given a cue here, students can watch the scene for that purpose at the next viewing.)
Step 3	The students repeat the dialog twice in chorus after the teacher, looking at the text.	The teacher explains only the words which seem very unfamiliar to the students.
Step 4	The teacher explains the meaning of any items students do not understand.	The students watch the scene on video twice.
Step 5	The teacher talks to students like one speaker of the dialog and asks them individually to respond like the other without referring to the text.	The same as the group without video.
Step 6	The teacher takes one part and students take the other looking at the text.	The same as the group without video.
Step 7	The students repeat the selected meaningful units from the dialog after the teacher without referring to the text until their mouth moves naturally.	The students practise the dialog twice following the exercise part of the video material. Three different video series give different ways of practice as below :

In It's Your Turn to Speak one actor looks toward the viewers and addresses them directly. The students are to reply to him and the correct answer is presented in written words at

the bottom of the screen immediately after the students were supposed to finish responding.

In *Your Video Passport* the actors' speaking scene is shown but one of the speakers' voice is erased. Students are to take this person's part following the written words presented at the bottom of the screen.

In *Look, Speak & Travel* the whole dialog is presented in written words without the scene being shown, and only one speaker's part is pronounced, the other speaker's part being left silent for the students' practice.

Through these seven steps, the identical dialogue was presented in the two groups and the students practised the same language in different ways. On the next stage, where the students were to use the language for themselves, which seems to be the most important stage in learning speaking, the same procedures were taken in the both groups.

- Step 8 The teacher talks to the students individually like one speaker in the dialog, and the students respond in the same way as the other speaker without looking at the text. (Students do not have to insist on letter-perfect recitation of the dialog. Minor changes are accepted.)
- Step 9 The teacher gives the students other expressions associated with the situation and the students practise them verbally.
- Step 10 The teacher gives a situation which is a little different from the dialog but which is realistic to the students, and talks to the students individually like one speaker in the dialog and the students make an utterance which is valid for the situation.
- Step 11 The students are divided into pairs to have a conversation with each other as they like, pretending to be in the similar situation as the dialog.

During the one-hour period, three dialogs were presented and practised through these eleven steps.

The students were to review and memorize what they learnt during the class hour before the next lesson. And at the beginning of the next lesson the teacher had a short

conversation with the students individually to let them speak in a given situation which was associated with the situation presented in the previous lesson.

The teacher concluded the six-day intensive speaking session with giving the students the same test as was given on the first day of the session, which was designed to see how much the students improved after the six-day intensive session.

## (b) Results

Many interesting things concerning how video affected the speaking class were observed during the six-day session and after examining the results of the test given on the first day and the last day of the session, compared with the regular speaking class without video.

### (i) Effects of Video Observed during the Class Activity.

There were two big differences observed in the video-used group compared with the no-video group. First, the students in the video-used group responded much better than those in the no-video group at Step 5 of the class activity. Although the students in the no-video group listened to the dialog, read the dialog, repeated after the teacher and were given full explanation of the dialog by this stage, their response did not sound confident enough, and they sometimes could not respond anything communicable, uttering only the beginning of the sentence and leaving the most important part of the sentence unuttered. For example, when the teacher said, "Try this dress on. How does it fit?" some student said, "It's, it's, it's. . . a little. . ." and she tried to remember the following expression in vain and finally referred to the text and read the sentence: "It's a little too small. May I have a medium?" In the video group, however, such a thing did not occur at Step 5. Although there were some minor mistakes in their response, all the students could manage to respond something communicable, sometimes with appropriate gestures. By this stage, the students in the video group hardly ever or never uttered the dialog themselves, but they watched the scene on video four times instead, which seemed to have helped students learn the expression so much.

Second, the video students' responses at Step 8 were much closer to the natural flow and rhythm of English than those of the no-video students. In the no-video group, although the intonation and the rhythm of the expression was drilled at Step 3 and 7, the students spoke very slowly at Step 8 and sometimes so slowly and monotonously that the teacher got impatient. In the video-used- group, where the students practised to speak with the actor in video, they had to answer within the limited time, which made them try to say anything communicable before the actor started making the next utterance. Consequently, they practised speaking with natural speed, which caused them some minor mistakes such as omission of articles and incorrect usage of be-

verbs, though. Practice with video seemed to have elicited a smooth, natural response of the learner.

(ii) Results of the Test

In the test given at the beginning and at the end of the six-day session, the students were given a certain situation on each of thirty-three items, and were asked to respond each statement or question by selecting the best expression or answer out of three options, all the directions, situations and questions being given orally in English. The questions were something similar to what was presented during the six-day session. Some examples are shown below :

“You will have an exam tomorrow, won't you? Good luck with the exam!”

- a. Oh, no.
- b. It's bad.
- c. Thanks.

“Can I help you?”

- a. Sorry, but I won't buy any today.
- b. No, thanks. I'm just looking around.
- c. Oh, thanks. I'll only see.

How much the students could answer correctly and how much they improved after the six-day session are shown by percentage in Table 2. Since one student in the no-video group failed to attend half of the session, and one student in the video-used group did not take the last test, the scores of six students in each group are presented.

Table 2  
Results of the Test  
(%)

Student	No-Video Group						Video-Used Group					
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Before the Session	73	82	79	52	43	49	82	61	61	64	52	64
After the Session	94	82	85	94	85	85	100	94	85	82	82	85
Improvement	21	0	6	42	42	36	18	33	24	18	30	21
Average of Improvement	24.5						24.0					

From this table we see two interesting things. First, the average scores of improvement in two groups are very close to each other, one is 24.5 and the other 24.0. Second, the scores of the video students' improvement are between 18% and 33%, while the scores of the no-video students range from 0% to 42%, the students who got low scores before the session showing much improvement (about 40%) but those who got high scores before the session less improvement.

When each question was examined about which student answered correctly in the second test, there appeared an interesting fact, that is, although most of the questions were answered correctly by the similar number of the students in both groups, on some specific types of questions or expressions, much more students in one group got correct answers than the students in the other group. First of all, the polite expressions used to show one's need or to ask a favor were properly acquired by the students in the video-used group. The questions of this type and the three options for the response are shown below, and Table 3 shows how many students in each group got correct answers for these questions.

- (A) (At a restaurant) "What would you like to drink?"
  - a. "Could you have a tea?"
  - b. "How about a tea?"
  - c. "May I have a tea?"
- (B) (At a jewelry store) "May I help you?"
  - a. "Yes. Would you like this bracelet?"
  - b. "Yes. Would you show me this bracelet?"
  - c. "Yes. Would you try it on?"
- (C) (In a park, you have a camera and you are looking for someone who is kind enough to take your picture.)
  - "Shall I take your picture?"
  - a. "Oh, thanks. Would you just push this button?"
  - b. "Oh, thanks. You may stand here and say cheese."
  - c. "Oh, thanks. Could I take my picture?"

Table 3  
Number of Students  
Who Had Correct Answers

	No-Video Group		Video-Used Group	
(A)	1	(16%)	4	(66%)
(B)	4	(66%)	6	(100%)
(C)	3	(50%)	6	(100%)

Secondly, the expressions including the words which looked easy but actually were very difficult for Japanese people to use, such as 'it', 'this', 'get' and 'take', were answered correctly by more students in the video-used group. The questions of this type are as follows and the number of the students who answered correctly are shown in Table 4.

- (D) (I am meeting you for the first time now.)  
 "Hi. I'm Reiko."  
 a . "Hi, Reiko. I'm Yoshiko."  
 b . "Hello. How do you do? It's Miss Sato."  
 c . "Hi, Reiko. This is Yoshiko."
- (E) (At a store) "Are you looking for a scarf? How about this one?"  
 a . "OK. Thanks."  
 b . "OK. I'll get it for you."  
 c . "OK. I'll take it."

Table 4  
 Number of Students  
 Who Had Correct Answers

	No-Video Group		Video-Used Group	
(D)	2	(33%)	6	(100%)
(E)	4	(66%)	6	(100%)

Finally, there was a question answered correctly by all the students in the no-video group but answered wrongly by half of the video students. The question and the three options for its response are as below :

- (F) (At a women's clothes store, you tried a dress on.)  
 "How does it fit?"  
 a . "It's a little too big. Do you have something smaller?"  
 b . "It doesn't fit well. May I have a little larger one?"  
 c . "It's a little too tight. Could I have a medium?"



The students in the video-used group watched the scene at a clothes store in video before, where a woman tried a shirt on to find it too small for her and said "It's a little too tight. May I have a medium?" All of the students who answered wrongly in this question chose 'c', which is just like what the woman said in video, although the given

condition in the test was different from the scene in video.

### (iii) The Students' Impression

All the students in both groups were asked, when the whole session was over, to write a free composition in Japanese about how they liked the six-day intensive speaking session and how much they thought they had learned.

Surprisingly and happily, all of the students in both groups wrote that they became much more confident of speaking in English than before. They felt so, probably because the small class consisting of six or seven students could give each student many chances to speak or to practise verbally.

About how much they think they had learned during the six-day program, only half of the no-video students wrote "learned very much," while all the video students wrote "learned very much." The students in the no-video group who thought to have learned very much wrote that since the teacher led them to memorize the expressions and since they did a lot of out-of-class memorization, they acquired a lot. The students in the video-used group, on the other hand, wrote that they learned so much because of video which let them understand the atmosphere of the situation by looking at the actor's facial expressions, body movement, and timing of the speech, and which made them feel as if they were really in that situation and were really speaking with a native speaker.

## Discussion

When we examine what was observed during the six-day intensive speaking session and the results of the test, we come to a conclusion that we cannot fully support the hypothesis that the video can provide better and quicker development in speaking ability. There are two crucial results that do not go with the hypothesis. First, according to the results of the test given before and after the six-day session, the students in the video-used group did not show larger development in responding in English than those in the no-video group, the mean average of improvement in each group being very close to each other. Second, as the item of the test responded poorly by the video students showed, the students in the video-used group had a tendency to respond spontaneously with the very same expression as the actor in the scene they had watched, even when they were in a little different situation where the same response was not appropriate.

In the observation of the class activity and in the result of the test, however, we also find two facts that can partly support the hypothesis.

First, it was observed that the video students performed better than the no-video

students in Step 5 and in Step 8 of the class activity. In Step 5, the video students managed to make more communicable utterance. By this stage, the video students was not given even a chance to repeat the dialog or to practise the expression, but they watched the scene on video four times instead. On the other hand, the no-video students had listened to the dialog, read the dialog, and repeated the dialog after the teacher verbally, looking at the text by this stage. The fact that the video students managed to utter more communicably at Step 5 leads us to declare that watching video is more effective than reading the text in the stage of imitating the dialog. In Step 8, the video students were observed to utter with more natural flow and rhythm than the no-video students. By Step 8, the video students practised uttering with the actor in video who did not wait longer than the native speaker's response would take before he made the next utterance, while the no-video students practised uttering with the teacher who could easily slow down the speed or repeat the same expression again and again when the students failed to follow her. This fact can prove that verbal practice with video is more effective than without it in learning speed, rhythm and timing.

The result of the test also presented what can partly go with the hypothesis, that is, polite expressions to ask a favor or to express one's need and expressions with simple but difficult-to-use words were learned better by the video students than the no-video students. The polite expressions, such as "Would you like to ... ?" "Could you please ... ?" "Could I ... ?" and "May I ... ?", and the expressions with simple words, such as "I am Reiko," "This is Tom," "I'll get it," and "I'll take it," are usually thought to be very difficult for Japanese students, but the video students learned them nearly perfectly. Now we can deduce that those idiomatic expressions can be learned with video more effectively.

From these two facts observed in the class activity and in the result of the test, it would be all right to say that the hypothesis can be partially supported, but not fully.

The test results show another notable fact that all the students in the video-used group improved almost the same amount (about 20 to 30%), while the students in the no-video group showed very different amount of development from each other, ranging from 0% to 42%. In the video-used group, the student who got a higher score before the session improved almost as much as the students who got lower scores before the session. In the no-video, text-centered group, however, the students who got higher scores before the session did not improve as much as those who got lower scores before the session. It is probably because the lesson with video gave abundant information from which students of any level could absorb something new and worth learning, but in the text-centered lesson, since the words and structures of the dialog were very easy when it was shown in a written text, the fast-learning student might have thought

there were not anything more to learn in the text for her. It can be said, therefore, lessons designed to promote oral fluency, especially when students of different levels are in one class, should not be allowed to become text-centered, but should utilize video instead.

The students' impression about the six-day session tells much about the use of video. Although only half of the students in the no-video group wrote that they had learned very much, all of the students in the video-used group wrote that they had learned very much. And the students in the no-video group showed an impression that they memorized the expression, while the video students thought that watching video let them learn when and how to use each expression. It seems that the students who learned with video did not feel that they were studying or memorizing but had a feeling that they were experiencing the situation with the people in the scene. Obviously, the students were motivated, stimulated and enjoying themselves with video. We can say that a couple minutes of video tape material can provide enough stimulation for one hour's teaching. However, we should not forget that the value of video depends on how much it contributes to the learning process. Its function is not to make the lesson more colorful, but to make learning more effective.<sup>3</sup>

Since the experiment was done in rare, privileged environments where the class is very small consisting of 6 to 7 willing-to-learn students, the same effects may not be expected in regular classes whose size is much larger. To some extent, however, it is suggested that proper use of video has a positive role in the process of learning speaking, although more research is needed in this field.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Donn Byrne, Teaching Oral English (Essex : Longman Group Ltd., 1976), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> John Markson-Brown, "Video Language as Input," The Language Teacher, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1985), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Donn Byrne, Teaching Oral English (Essex : Longman Group Ltd., 1976), p. 128.

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