

Using the Closed Caption in Class

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In order to upgrade the development of language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) for communication and to increase motivation in remedial and intermediate students of the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey at the Mexico City Campus, the use of videos with closed caption is considered a helpful tool.

As is known, closed captioning refers to subtitles or words displayed on a television screen. Subtitles of dialogues appear on the screen as well as descriptions of sounds happening in the scenes and dialogues. It was first intended for the hearing disabled through a device called telecaption, but now it may be a useful tool for teaching English as a second/foreign language. Originally, the telecaption was a decoder connected to a VCR, but recently TVs and VCRs have this device built in. Now almost anywhere TVs and VCRs with telecaption or closed caption are easy to acquire.

Having the telecaption built into TVs and VCRs, English speaking movies, shows, documentaries, news, series, etc., with the proper codification (CC) are possible to watch and read with subtitles in English.

ESL/EFL teachers may organize video sessions for their students with this technological tool. The students read the captions in English as well as listening and watching and, with clear planning, they may carry out oral and writing activities. In this way the four language skills are integrated in one video session.

If good communication is to be established, two parts are required—an addresser and addressee. The former sends a message and the latter decodes it. When students have not fully developed their listening skills, they may not understand the addresser's message. In a video presentation in English the same situation occurs. They are unable to understand the video; conse-

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quently, they cannot effectively participate in commenting on the video, giving their opinion or writing a review.

The advantages of using a closed caption video presentation are the following:

Learning about the culture of English speaking countries. Documentaries about English speaking countries are used by teachers to show students cultural aspects of the target language so they may have a clearer view and increased knowledge. With close captioned videos the students not only will learn through the images and sounds presented but also through the language used, as they read the captions. They read every detail of the language presented in these documentaries.

Learning pronunciation, vocabulary, structures, idiomatic expressions for communicating. Many times a lesson may be focused on the pronunciation of word, phrase, sentence. In a video class with closed caption, the students will hear the target words, phrases, and sentences and will be familiarized with knowing how these are spoken and written. Through this, they obtain a closer native-like pronunciation when they find with these words taught in a real situation. Vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and structures may also be taught in the same way. I once gave a lesson on interrogatives with the *be* and *do/does* forms to my basic level students. After teaching the interrogative form, I showed them a video of the program *Dinosaurs* in which its characters frequently used the interrogative with these forms. My students watched the program attentively and learned how the interrogative was applied. Before showing this program, I emphasized the form and function through an introductory lesson. After the video session and with the appropriate control, the students practiced with drills, questions and answers and interrogative sentence writing.

Developing the ability to listen and read. When showing a video without closed caption, there will always be parts that students do not understand, yet in their minds they will try to fill the gaps they do not understand by inferring what happened through the gestures of the protagonists or the sequence of events, etc. Implementing closed captioning will help students have a better comprehension of the video, as though they were understanding the whole content although they may still not understand some parts. However, comprehension of the program will always be much better than that of a video without captions.

Reading the captions in a video, students can select the most useful elements so that the text makes sense. They may relate, when guessing the meaning of these subtitles, the new information to their previous knowledge. Students may make use of this existing knowledge to predict what will come afterwards. This encourages students to avoid reading word by word as they derive meaning from the whole text.

Exercises with cloze techniques are applicable for understanding the general idea of a listening text. Activities such as answering questions in a quiz or looking for meaning in context (what comes before or after a phrase, or sentence) in a listening/reading text may be applied to understand specific meanings.

Integrating the four language skills. Besides listening and reading, students can speak or write about movies such as *Dead Poets Society*. For example, in my intermediate class we discuss the content of this movie. I ask my students general questions so that they participate in conversation, or I ask them specific questions from a quiz about a certain topic found in the movie. For the writing skill, we brainstorm for ideas in order to choose a topic for writing. We may go back to the video if there are any questions about the topic we are discussing. By seeing the captions again these questions are cleared up, and there is a better understanding concerning what we are talking or writing about.

The videos used may be entertainment shows, news, documentaries, movies, or whatever the teacher considers appropriate to present natural settings and language usage.

Also, the presentation of a closed caption video contributes to the students' motivation. In the video presentation there may be students who tend to be either more visual or auditory. The visual students respond better to any information given in a visual way and tend to prefer pictorial and graphic representations. The auditory students show their preference for oral lessons and are inclined to tapes with conversations, talks, songs (Richards and Lockhart 1994, 68). Both may be motivated since in a video they are watching images, looking at words and listening to sounds. Thus, the information is perceived and classified from these two tendencies. Students love to watch videos, especially recent and successful programs, movies, etc. This also contributes to their motivation so their attention is directed to what is shown. Besides, listening and reading skills are being developed at the

same time. Plus, with the proper planning and activities, the speaking and writing skills may also be incorporated.

References²

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² You can also get information on the internet: <http://www.us.net/ici/process.htm>.