

2. Le poids des images

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Video is an inexhaustible source of authentic material but it takes some pedagogical expertise to didacticise that material appropriately and turn it into an effective teaching tool be that for the classroom or self-study context. In the latter situation, the relevance of the tasks offered to the learner is of paramount importance since the worksheet that accompanies the video is the sole mediator between the learner and the message. It would be inappropriate to design a worksheet that merely tests the learner's comprehension of the language. The material must rather guide and support the search for meaning, helping learners to organise their understanding in such a way that it can be used and built upon later. The tasks should not therefore be conceived of as tests, but rather as a means of focusing the learner's attention on linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of the video document's content, while at the same time developing the learner's awareness and use of relevant listening-and-viewing strategies.

It is tempting to rely entirely on the tapescript when devising these pre-, per- and post-viewing tasks, but that would be to ignore an important and useful part of the message. In devising material to accompany a video document it is crucial to give some thought to what it is that makes video comprehension so different from plain listening comprehension, namely the pictures that accompany the sounds. These pictures convey a great quantity of information that prefaces, illustrates, supplements and even occasionally contradicts the spoken message.

In this article I discuss how the visual element in video can be fully exploited in viewing tasks. I aim to show that the pictures are far from accessory, that as an integral part of the whole message they can be used to facilitate and supplement listening comprehension as well as to prompt exploration of what lies below and around the words uttered. Video relays language in all its glorious context and that context can be used, the visual element being enlisted as the learner's ally, not ignored or treated as a distracting blur of colour and movement that interferes with comprehension. The more we capitalise on the power of the pictures through tasks that encourage the learner to use the visual information to aid and reinforce linguistic comprehension, the better equipped the learner will be to deal with sound and vision in real-life contexts.

The tasks described in this article were, for the most part, elements of worksheets produced to accompany short televised news reports within the framework of VIFAX¹ which is generally used in autonomous or semi-autonomous learning situations. News is a good genre for language teaching because of the motivation factor inherent in the fact that the information conveyed is fresh, the pictures authentic, the format easily understood and the whole anchored in a cultural context. Because of its visual presence, television is perceived to convey conviction and authenticity in ways that printed text do not. Indeed, surveys have shown that television news is by far the most important source of information for the majority of people and widely regarded as the most unbiased news medium.² It would, however, be naïve to believe that news is impartial and objective. The news that we see on our televisions is screened by the television companies that produce and broadcast it. The stories that they choose to develop, the conclusions drawn, the camera angles used, the running order, the people interviewed, the questions asked are all conditioned by the motivations and values of the culture that produce it. In the words of Kathleen Tyner, "Media messages are not windows on the world, or mirrors of society, but carefully manufactured products."³ That very partiality and subjectivity can be interesting material for the language learner.

Language teachers sometimes consider news reports as inappropriate learning material because they are entirely scripted. While the newscaster's text and the voice-over are undoubtedly scripted, news reports very often also incorporate spontaneous speech in interviews with people in the news, or even reactions from people in the street. A quick check of the tapescripts prepared by the VIFAX team over the past six weeks shows that, on average, three different people spoke in the course of the reports chosen for didacticisation (the lengths of those reports ranging from 1'30 to 3'00). From a visual point of view, the change in speaker is almost always accompanied by an interesting change in backdrop and a change in body language.

The downside of asking learners to concentrate on the visual channel is that their eyes are entirely taken up with watching the screen and they have very little visual attention left over to allot to completing the task on their worksheets. This means that learners must be familiar with the task before they press "play" and that they should be encouraged to make as much use as necessary of the "pause" button. Worksheet tasks should also be devised in such a way that, materially, the learner/viewer has very little to do while s/he watches, even if s/he is very active cognitively. Matching, selecting etc. are appropriate operations that do not need too much physical attention and can be carried out with one eye on the screen so to speak⁴. Eventually it is to be

hoped that most learners and material developers will have access to multimedia facilities which will eliminate this constraint and provide scope for more motivating and enjoyable tasks. In a multimedia environment, the images are actually there on the screen to be dragged and dropped, re-ordered, matched with corresponding sound bites etc. Pencil and paper are eliminated and the tasks can be done on screen alongside the video making the video-task-learner interaction even more immediate. This offers more scope for exciting possibilities that take into account the changed relationship between video, sound and graphics, where the video can be viewed in a non-linear fashion and the tasks completed in new ways with minimal attention switching between the video and the task.

It might seem somewhat paradoxical in a language teaching situation to lay such emphasis on non-verbal messages, especially since it has been argued that this visual element may sometimes distract from the verbal message. While this certainly may sometimes be true, we would argue that the images more often augment and reinforce that message. The truth is that when we watch video the visual and the aural channels are so inextricably entwined that our minds often have difficulty in telling them apart, or at least in remembering which mode delivered a given message. A recent study set out to show whether or not images and words get mixed up in the mind of the viewer so that s/he cannot remember later which was the source of an idea or piece of information. It also attempted to show whether one mode was dominant⁵. The study showed that people more often reported having heard something that in fact was not said but shown, than having seen something that was not shown, but said. T. Grimes, the author of the study thus concludes that "audio and visual materials are not experienced as separate unique channels of information by the viewer; rather, they often intermingle and alter each other."⁶ If this is true, then worksheets that do not have at least one task that deliberately draws attention to images are missing an important part of the message, a part of the message that is experienced by the viewing/listening language learner as indissociable from the aural message.

The rest of this article, based on actual VIFAX examples, is concerned with the ways in which the visual can be integrated into our comprehension tasks, in much the same way as it is integrated into our everyday understanding of video documents.

1. Pre-focusing

Before watching the report, the learner can be asked to anticipate by guessing what

sort of pictures will be included. Like all pre-focussing activities, this type of pre-viewing task encourages the learner to think about the subject matter by asking them to formulate their expectations. Although s/he is concentrating on the picture content, the wording of the task itself also offers the opportunity for some linguistic input.

What do you expect to see?

You are going to watch a report about an oil spillage. What sort of pictures do you expect to see? Underline any of the pictures described below that you think will appear in the report. Then watch the report to see if you were right.

Waves breaking	birds covered in oil	people wearing waterproofs
beached whales	an oil tanker	a petrol station
an environmentalist	windsurfers	cows in a field
a city centre	a satellite image	a sea captain

Anticipation

You are going to watch a report about homelessness in London. Imagine that you are the reporter: what sort of pictures would you ask the cameraman to take? Jot down any ideas below.

2. No-sound tasks

The rolling news channel Euronews has a regular slot called "No Comment" which, as its name suggests, presents news footage with no commentary whatsoever. This would appear to show that although a picture (or series of pictures) may not tell the whole story, one can get a pretty good idea of what a news report is about just by looking at the pictures. And this is all the more true if, as is often the case, one is already familiar with the background to that news story. Watching the report first with the sound turned down, followed by a simple task to complete, can be a very effective form of preparation, i.e. getting the learner ready for the barrage of words that is to come by pre-arming him/her with a conceptual framework into which the linguistic information can be slotted. The learner prepares for the listening-and-viewing phase by gradually homing in on the subject matter using all of the non-verbal clues available. Having gleaned as much information as possible from the pictures and the information given in the task itself, s/he is all the more receptive to the verbal information when it is eventually discovered.

What do you see?

Watch the report once *with no sound*. Underline any of the items below that you see on screen.

people pushing a car	a snow plough	a weather map
people playing ice hockey	people throwing snowballs	people skiing
lorries blocked on a bridge	a woman wrapped in a blanket	a wrecked car
cars crawling along a motorway	a weather forecaster	icicles

What do you think the report is about?

First, *watch without the sound*. Circle the sentence you think best describes what the report is about.

- There are too many unmarried mothers nowadays.
- Some US mothers are too fat when they give birth.
- Urban poor mothers are not getting enough postnatal treatment.
- Screening programmes for diseases are insufficient in the USA.

Match what you see with where you see it

Watch the report once without the sound and match up what you see with where you see it.

What Where

An old couple, the man has a walking stick

The House of Commons

A nurse in a blue uniform

on the sea front

An old lady in a wheelchair

in a shopping street

An old couple holding hands

in a nursing home

An M.P. making a speech

in a garden

3. Focus on the pictures, forget about the sound

Images are more accessible than words; they are meaningful to everybody, regardless of linguistic ability.⁷ The non-verbal conventions of television are easy to decode because they call upon pre-existing visual and cognitive skills. In the words of Paul Messaris

What makes images unique as a mode of communication is precisely the fact that they are not merely another form of arbitrary signification. Learning to understand images does not require the lengthy period of initiation characteristic

of language learning, and permeability of cultural boundaries is much greater for images than it is for language.⁸

By asking learners to do something that has no apparent relationship with the verbal message we give them time to build up confidence ; time during which some of the verbal message may filter through and the difficulty of the language content can cut down to manageable proportions.

Watch the whole report and put the following scenes into the order that you see them.

- ___ barricades being removed ___ a meeting
 ___ armed militia men on the streets ___ the Slovenian parliament building
 ___ a press conference

4. Getting the names straight

Tasks that appear towards the beginning of the worksheet and focus on the characteristics of different people can clear up any potential confusion about who is who.

Who?

Watch the whole report and then decide which of the phrases apply to Bob Hawke and which apply to Paul Keating.

- ___ We see him wearing a white shirt. ___ He has brown eyes.
 ___ He is Prime Minister. ___ He looks younger than his opponent.
 ___ He touches his tie a lot. ___ He was Treasurer/Minister of Finance.

Similarly for places:

Where?

Watch the whole report once. During the report you see all of the scenes described below, but do they take place in North Korea or in South Korea? Write N or S next to each item.

- ___ soldiers wearing fur hats ___ men wearing white caps
 ___ a mural in a public building ___ a motorbike shop
 ___ an old woman looking ___ a chain of people holding a ribbon
 at photographs
 ___ little girls waving ___ a massive statue of a Korean

5. Kinesics

By deliberately drawing the learner's attention to non-verbal visual communication, kinesics, we can highlight some of the messages that come across only partially in the verbal mode. Learners may be asked to interpret facial expression, eye contact, gesture, and body posture. Attention can also be drawn to the fact that visual effects interact with speech: gestures and head movements tend to coincide with points of emphasis, hand movements in particular can be used to add visual emphasis to what has been said⁹.

Body language

Watch the whole report to get the general impression, concentrating on the expressions on the soldiers' faces, their body language and their tone of voice.

Would you say that the soldiers interviewed are :

seriously injured?	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
depressed about the situation in Somalia?	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
looking forward to getting back to the States?	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
critical of U.N. action in Somalia?	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
quite cheerful?	yes <input type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>

6. Focus on the sound-vision relationship

By drawing attention to the relationship between what is seen and what is heard, we can provide information or lexical items given verbally and ask the learner to provide the link with what is seen on screen.

What do you see?

The following things are all mentioned in the report but which of them do you actually *see*?

low reservoirs ocean waters desalination plant rain clouds a water pipeline

Tick any events you actually see

The report says the following events have taken place at Pucklechurch Remand Centre. Read carefully through the list, then, as you watch, put an X after the ones that you do in fact see.

Prison inmates shout at staff	Inmates use chisels and pickaxes
Prisoners set fire to buildings	One inmate surrenders

Prisoners brandish a banner

One prisoner is taken to hospital

Staff direct waterhose at inmates

Inmates steal an officer's keys

Prisoners throw debris at staff

Prisoners receive injuries

7. Match pictures of what you see with what they illustrate

Hobbs says that "When faculty design reading and viewing experiences where the focus is exclusively on comprehension of key facts, they neglect to provide opportunities for students to make use of their own interpretive skills in the reading and critical viewing process."¹⁰ Tasks that gives the learner the opportunity to link the visual message with an oral message, are designed to focus on reasons for the inclusion of certain shots in a given report, encouraging the learner to think not only about the language used but the way in which the report is constructed. In news reports the pictures often say things that the words do not ; this offers scope for further language practice and analysis of the implicit message.

Tasks that exploit the visual material often give us the opportunity to paraphrase information given verbally in the video document. This can give the learner a second chance to understand the reformulated version, or perhaps offer food for thought by giving a more interesting way of saying the same thing.

The images

We see all of the pictures described below, but why? Choose the best reason for the inclusion of each picture.

A temporary structure covered in green tarpaulins

- The Houses of Parliament are being renovated
- Preparations are being made for the opening of parliament
- Parliament is moving to a new building

A modern glass building

- It's a building in Brussels
- It's the headquarters of a mobile-phone company, Mercury
- It's the headquarters of the Labour Party

A woman walking along the street using a mobile phone

- There is to be a new tax on mobile phones
- An inquiry has been ordered into the dangers of mobile phones
- The woman is a new Labour MP

Taxis in traffic

- Minicabs will now be taxed 20p per week
- Tony Blair is in the taxi
- There are to be new regulations about traffic in cities

Tony Blair having a cup of tea

- He's meeting his new ministers.
- He's thanking Labour Party members from his constituency.
- He's meeting parents from Dunblane.

This exercise is about the pictures that you see on the screen.

Watch the report again and match the description of the picture on the left with the reason for it being in the report on the right.

Pictures

a man climbing in through a window
Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania
a plastic phial
colour pictures of a concert
Bob Redfield
black and white pictures of a concert
Ruffin up in front of a judge

Why we see them

Ruffin was a star in the fifties.
Ruffin had been convicted of drug possession.
Ruffin was driven there.
The police are investigating Ruffin's death.
Ruffin had recently been on tour.
He was Ruffin's manager.
Ruffin died of a cocaine reaction.

Below are two lists, one of the pictures that you see during the report and another of the reasons for those pictures being in the report. Can you match each picture with the reason for its inclusion?

Picture

Lots of people taking photographs
An old woman lying in bed
A young girl lying in bed

Why?

To illustrate the fact that the infant mortality rate and notes has increased.
To show that radiation readings are well above normal in some places.
To show that Western journalists are visiting this site

A lake	To show that many people have died of cancer here.
A man holding a Geiger counter.	As an example of a test site that is still radioactive.

8. Concentrating on the structure of the report

A useful way to orient the learner's understanding of the report is to encourage him/her to think about the way the report is structured. This gives the learner the framework, albeit in kit form, upon which to hang the linguistic information contained in the video.

Below is a list of the different elements that make up this report. Watch the report once and number the elements according to the order in which they appear. Some of them have been done for you.

Order

- _____ Pictures of Simpson's arrival home
- _____ The verdict and Simpson's reaction to it
- _____ Robert Shapiro's comments on the race factor in the trial
- _____ Reporter outside Simpson's home.
- 1 Presenter's introduction
- _____ One juror's comments of the verdict
- _____ Johnnie Cochran's comments on the verdict
- _____ Cochran's response to Shapiro's remarks
- _____ Emotion of one of the prosecutors
- 11 District Attorney's remarks
- _____ More pictures of Simpson's arrival home
- _____ Pictures of L.A. police
- _____ Pictures of the party at Simpson's house
- 5 Reactions of the families, and counsels to the verdict
- _____ Police Chief's comments on the verdict

9. Look for visual evidence

This type of activity encourages learners not to take what they hear at face value, to create his/her own link between what is said and what is actually seen. Again, the

language contained in the task itself can be a pretext for glossing, rephrasing explaining. In a multimedia context the learner can be asked to actually click on the screen when he sees the visual evidence he is looking for, or to drag a still showing the video evidence into the appropriate box etc.

Look for visual evidence

Watch the whole report. During the report you will hear all of the statements below but do you see any visual evidence to support these statements? Is there any visual evidence?

There is above-average rush-hour traffic	yes / no
Many people are leaving Kobe	yes / no
People are living in shelters	yes / no
People have been given rice to eat	yes / no
People are walking around the streets in a daze	yes / no

10. Graphics

The visual aspect of televised news often includes written words which can also be exploited. News reports often summarise the main points of a new law in the form of a table or list which is seen on screen. The newscaster usually goes through the points one by one but doesn't always necessarily use exactly the same words as those seen on screen. Learners can be asked to listen out for the words used by the newscaster in order to complete a cloze text. The verbal message that accompanies these printed words often goes beyond the graphic.

Words you hear versus words you see

You see the phrases on the left, on the screen but the reporter gives you more information. Can you complete his exact words?

<i>What you see</i>	<i>What you hear</i>
Stop interference with U.N.	Stop __ U.N. __ and relief __.
Stop border harassment of Kuwait.	Stop __ personnel to the __ with Kuwait.
Stop "testing" the U.N. coalition	Stop __ the __ of the United Nations coalition.

11. Highlighting subjectivity

We mentioned earlier the partiality and subjectivity of news reports. A study

carried out during a period of industrial dispute found that in BBC and ITV coverage of industrial relations, management tended to be filmed face on, in studio-like surroundings that lend authority to what they were saying, whereas workers and union officials were most often filmed at an angle to the camera, by the factory gates or on a picket line, with decisive consequences on the production of meaning¹¹. Tasks can be devised to draw attention to these discrepancies.

Focus on the interviews with the union representative and the manager. Complete the table below.

	<i>Union representative</i>	<i>Manager</i>
Where does the interview take place?		
What is he wearing?		
Is he looking straight at the camera?		
For how long does he talk?		

12. Going beyond the commentary

Learners may also be asked to describe what they see on screen. People, for example, can be described using an inverse identikit format where students have to assemble the written descriptions of physical features. This type of description is not usually found in the commentary because the pictures render it superfluous.

Choose terms to describe physical appearance

Move the video cassette ahead to c. 078 and push on the pause button to hold the image of the freed hostage. Below is a list of adjectives and nouns. *Circle* those which apply to the hostage.

hat glasses white T-shirt sanguine tired smiling balding khaki
long-sleeved shirt jacket dazzled by light thin hunched

Photo-fit description of person seen on screen

Vocabulary Watch the report from 404-408 where you see the "Photo-Fit" pictures. Put a tick beside the physical features given below which correspond to what you see in the photos.

Hair long straight curly bald
Glasses thick-rimmed thin-rimmed

Eyebrows	bushy	thinly-plucked		
Hair style	fringe	part in middle	locks on forehead	
Cheek bones	high	protruding		
Chin	double	sharp		
Facial expression	severe	smiling	worried/wrinkled forehead	
Nose	snub	long		
Lips	full	thin		
Face	freckled	wrinkled	square	oval

What is she wearing?

Watch the whole report once. The Duchess of York is famous for her taste in fashion (or lack of it!). Circle any of the garments or jewellery listed below that you see her wearing.

red high-heels	black knee-high boots	gold stilettos
a flowery dress	a short flowery skirt	a strapless dress
a denim jacket	jeans	a black polo-neck
a long silver jacket	a silk blouse	a taffeta ball gown
a diamond necklace	pearl drop earrings	a diamond tiara

13. Articulating actions

A variation on this last type of task may involve describing what any given character actually is seen doing. The task can be closed, (i.e. the learner selects from a list of possible actions) or more open.

Match item with action

Watch the same segment of the report again. Below are listed actions you see being performed. Match an item from Column A with one from Column B.

<i>Column A</i>	<i>Column B</i>
1. wiggling	a. a gun
2. waving	b. cattle
3. riding	c. his hat
4. branding	d. his hips
5. herding	e. a horse
6. firing	f. a steer

What do you see a particular person do?

Eye-witness! Go back and watch the segments which show the prisoners on the roof. One of the prisoners, with very short, close-cropped, fair hair, is wearing a turquoise green jacket with white armbands, grey trousers and sports shoes. Which of the following things do you see him do? Tick as appropriate.

- shouting to reporters
- going back down into the prison
- holding the surrendering prisoner's clothes
- pulling open the fire-escape for another prisoner
- waving a cloth from a prison window
- climbing up the roof
- sitting away from the other prisoners on another part of the roof
- scratching the back of his neck

What are these people doing?

Watch the whole report and match the actions listed below with the names of the people doing them on the screen. Put the letters given in parentheses after each name into the space provided in front of each action. Winnie Mandela (WM), Nelson Mandela (NM), Brian Mulroney (BM), Members of Parliament (MPs), Honorable John Crosbie (JC), people in the crowd (C), or a Mandela helper (MH). You may have more than one for some.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> signing a book | <input type="checkbox"/> applauding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pushing his glasses up | <input type="checkbox"/> giving black power salute |
| <input type="checkbox"/> waving to the crowd | <input type="checkbox"/> giving thumbs up sign |
| <input type="checkbox"/> buttoning his jacket | <input type="checkbox"/> cheering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> passing the bucket | <input type="checkbox"/> putting a bill in the bucket |

Describe it!

Watch the whole report concentrating on the pictures. Choose the best description for each subject.

The French strip

Blue top with white trim, white shorts, red socks.

White top with blue trim, blue shorts, red socks.

Blue top with red trim, white shorts, blue socks.

The Brazilian strip

Yellow top with blue trim, yellow shorts, blue socks.

Yellow top with green trim, blue shorts, white socks

Yellow top with white trim, green shorts, yellow socks

Brazil's free kick

Goes round the wall, hits the goal post before going into the net.

Goes through the wall and straight into the net.

Goes round the wall, the goalkeeper saves it and then lets it in.

France's free kick

Just a few metres from the goal, the ball bounces off a Brazilian.

Goes into the net after bouncing off several Brazilians.

Gets through the Brazilian wall but is saved by the goalkeeper.

France's goal

21 takes a free kick, N° 22 readjusts the trajectory of the ball.

22 aims from the middle of the pitch and scores.

N° 21 takes a shot at goal, the goalkeeper saves it but N° 22 scores.

These example tasks illustrate a number of ways in which the visual channel in video documents can be exploited in pre-viewing and viewing tasks that facilitate the interaction between the learner and the input. These tasks can be designed not only to focus the learners' attention on the messages, but also to stimulate their prior knowledge and expectations about the text and to give direction to their understanding of the linguistic component. Obviously, many more such tasks could have been included : only the paradigm matters.

Notes

1. I am indebted to past and present colleagues on the VIFAX team, notably E. Eshom-Nicholas, L. Perrin and J. Walski, who originally devised some of the example tasks that follow.
2. Cf. Eldridge J, "News, truth and power" pp. 3-33 in Eldridge J (ed), *Getting the Message: News truth and power*. London, Routledge, 1993.
3. Tyner, Kathleen. (1994) Videotaped interview. *Tuning in to media: Literacy for the information age*. Quoted by R. Hobbs (Internet reference).

4. For a description and classification of appropriate tasks see L. Graham, 1995.
5. Students watched a fabricated news report during which "information "was presented exclusively through audio or video channels. For example, the subject heard "Recent studies show that many people are susceptible to stress during dating "and the video showed a group of male students. In this way the images suggested that men suffer stress during dating. The subjects then responded to two tests of message mixing: one for mix-ups in which the student wrongly attributed a visual message to an auditory source or vice-versa. (Polin, Internet reference).
6. T. Grimes, "Encoding TV News Messages Into Memory ", *Journalism Quarterly*, 67(4), 757-766, p. 766.
7. Using field experimental procedures, Hobbs et al found that Pokot tribespeople have a very well developed ability to comprehend a story presented on television, "even when a message makes use of extensive editing which fragments time and space, including close-ups, flashbacks, and parallel editing techniques." (Hobbs, 1991)
8. Messaris, Paul. (1994). *Visual 'Literacy': Image, Mind and Reality*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, pp. 39-40, quoted by Hobbs (1991).
9. For a description of "linguistic non-verbal communication "see P. Riley, 1981, pp. 152-153
10. Hobbs (Internet reference).
11. Cf Hartley J, 1990. *Understanding News*. London, Routledge.

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