

# languages ICT

## Technology for languages

### Focus on DVD, TV and video resources

Short video clips or target language movies, available in a wide range of foreign and community languages, have many uses in the languages classroom. Whether downloaded from the Internet, recorded from satellite television, or viewed on commercially produced DVDs, films and video clips bring learners into contact with both the target language and the culture of a country. They can see adverts for familiar products sold internationally, news bulletins, weather forecasts, well-known cartoon characters, drama and much more. Such resources can be used to create many stimulating language activities, some of which are outlined in this document.

#### Matching by gist

For younger learners, a simple reading activity can be used with a film clip or series of TV advertisements. For example, each pupil is given a card or piece of paper with a description of a character or product. As pupils watch the clip, they have to hold up the card when their character appears or speaks. An alternative is to give each pupil several cards, so they have to select the correct one each time.

For older pupils, a variation on this activity might be to issue cards, which have to be re-ordered to create an account of the scene viewed.

Animation DVDs of well-known animation characters are available in many languages. They are familiar to pupils and offer strong caricature and exaggeration. They are particularly advantageous in the following ways:

- Dubbing – there is no off-putting lip synchronisation, which happens with conventional movies dubbed from one language into another.
- Complexity – a wide variety of complex emotions and ideas can be conveyed in a more immediate way than authentic film is able to do.

The quirky characters and story lines can lead to many creative activities after watching the film or clip. For example, pupils can find images of the cartoon characters and create their own comic strip stories with call-outs (see AutoShapes in Word or PowerPoint) for dialogue; they can use images in presentations and add audio to the characters or can simply create narratives around the character, perhaps a life story or an amusing imaginary incident. Comic strip creation software is also available. Try, for example, **Comic Life**, a cheap shareware product, or search for a suitable product on the Internet.

#### Using DVD stills

It is easy to navigate a DVD to identify a key scene illustrating a character or giving a flavour of the story as a whole, as a focus for description. Pausing on a scene gives a very clear image. If you are viewing the DVD from your computer with a media player such as the freeware **VLC player**, you can capture a screen snapshot. This can be saved and opened in interactive whiteboard software as an image on which you can make annotations or alternatively can be used in a presentation with speech bubbles containing text written

by the teacher or by pupils working independently. Be aware that some DVDs also allow you to zoom and pan around a scene using the remote control, offering an opportunity for speculation.

### **Listening practice**

Many techniques used in listening comprehension activities, such as gap-fill, note taking for gist or for detail, and text reordering, can work more effectively with moving images as the pupils have a clear visual clue of who is speaking and the context they are in.

### **Cultural clues**

Authentic foreign language films, TV shows and advertisements are an extremely valuable resource, which offer a lot more to language teaching than linguistic exposure. They offer pupils a huge range of images of the foreign country, the landscape, the people, their houses, cities, rural areas, customs, and history. The class can be set observational activities, feeding into pair and whole-class discussion. Pupils can then work in groups to research cultural aspects suggested by the footage, leading to oral presentation and/or written work to compare the target language country with the UK. This type of activity can address country-specific stereotypes.

### **Guess the scenario**

With subtitles off or covered, ask pupils to watch a particular scene from a film or TV show without sound and to guess what is going on. This can be an excellent whole-class oral activity. Pupils may be asked to take notes to help them participate more easily in speaking activities. Support materials may be used to assist pupils: key words or phrases or an outline of key elements in the scene, such as place names or people's identities and roles. This can then lead into creative dialogue writing. Alternatively, you can simply replay the scene with sound and compare the class notes with the actual dialogue, showing subtitles if necessary. Make sure that the scene you select has some visual clues and some expressive acting so that pupils can gain an idea about the theme and can write some of the dialogue themselves.

### **Reconstructing action**

Play a particular scene from a film or TV show and blank the screen, so that only the sound can be heard. As a whole-class oral activity, pupils can surmise on the possible context, background and action accompanying the scene. A follow-on activity could be for pupils to act out their imagined scene to match the dialogue, before they watch the scene with both image and audio. With more advanced pupils, they can act out the scene and ad lib their own dialogue. You could do a similar activity using just the music from a scene. It may be necessary to provide some support material: key phrases, words, and names.

### **Imaginative sequencing**

If a film or TV show has a strong narrative, you can show a scene from the middle of the production. Pupils could be asked to guess what came before the chosen scene or what will happen after. This offers opportunities for practising different tenses and thinking imaginatively in the target language. Pupils can also identify one character and write what they would do in the future if they were that person, using the conditional tense.

### **Reading and writing follow-up activities**

For film clips involving a journey or a particularly clear sequence of events, pupils can be asked to do various activities after watching the clip. They can reorder a list of statements

to match the sequence: on cards, if possible, to increase the flexibility of the exercise. They can correct deliberate errors in the statements as a grammar exercise. A more challenging exercise would be to write a narrative account of the sequence from scratch. Alternatively, using the clip as a stimulus, pupils could write and illustrate their own storyboard for the sequence of events seen in the clip. For practising imperative forms, pupils may be asked to watch the sequence and then write a series of commands, which would have engendered the sequence of events in the clip. Support materials such as key vocabulary or useful phrases may be used to assist pupils.

### Text-based preparatory activities

Texts printed and adapted from the web are a useful resource. Search foreign language websites to find simple synopses of popular films, which can then be adapted for use in class, perhaps as a means to introduce the key vocabulary in a particular scene or the general context of the film. You may also find stills from the film that can be used for follow-up writing activities or to introduce and describe the main characters. You may also find sites where teachers have posted their own pedagogic exercises related to the film or even transcripts of important scenes.

### Using DVD subtitles

The subtitle features on DVDs open up new techniques for exploiting film and other foreign language material. It is sometimes possible to find films where both audio and subtitles are available in the same target language. Reading and listening at the same time can help to reinforce the connection between the sound and written form of the language and to build vocabulary. Be aware that subtitles can sometimes be an abbreviated form of the audio, however. An effective self-access activity for vocabulary building is to watch a film in English with subtitles in the target language. Check individual DVDs for options available.

### Aural clues

You can use sequences without dialogue from films in any language, particularly with more advanced pupils. They can work in pairs, whereby one watches the scene while the other sits with his/her back to the screen and listens. The scene needs to feature clear sounds, such as a car starting up, opening and closing doors or a dog barking. The pupil watching takes notes on what is happening, while the student listening notes the sounds he/she can make out. They then work orally in pairs, one pupil asking questions of the other to ascertain whether s/he has heard correctly (e.g. Was there someone running downstairs?; I heard a bird singing, is that right?) The pupil who watched the film then explains what was actually happening, before they watch the scene together.

### Where to look

VLC Media Player: <http://vlc-media-players.com/>

Comic Life: <http://plasq.com/products>