

## ETV Programmes for English Language Learning and Teaching

James Wong

How can ETV programmes help English teaching and learning? This was the question we asked ourselves and our panels of TEFL/TESL people at the start of planning the pilot programmes early in 1973. We took a long hard look at the English syllabus for primary schools and accompanying teachers' handbooks, pupils' textbooks and teachers' schemes of work; we considered the content of TESL in-service courses, and the audio-visual aids teachers were recommended to use. What could we do to support and complement the programme in schools?

A list of general aims was drawn up – to help revise, reinforce and consolidate learning of language structures; to re-use the important syllabus items that need extra attention and to amalgamate them with other items in larger groups; to give contextualised practice; to extend vocabulary; to present varied situations beyond the scope of the teacher in the classroom; to present varied examples of good speech patterns and improve pronunciation, stress, rhythm, intonation; to present stories which can be used for real oral discussion; to provide further oral, reading and writing activities in follow-up work.

There are now (1979) a total of fifty-seven programmes as in the schedule attached. A dozen of the early productions had clown sequences and songs, Uncle Ernie and children and a magic flute, and teaching or response modules. The clowns slowly enlarged their roles as a result of feedback, a conjurer was introduced into four programmes, and other available talent came in as the series developed over the past five years. After about twenty programmes, the teaching/overt response modules were merged in with the action as the tv characters spoke directly to the viewers or were dropped completely when they were found to interrupt the flow of the story.

Teachers interviewed were in two minds about these response modules. Many wanted them retained, but if story re-telling or other continuous speech activities were an important aim of the programme, then perhaps this type of practice should be left to after the telecast. Some liked the multiple-choice type, others the conversion, and sentence-completion types. Parents of pupils watching the programmes at home reported that response-module time was break-time. While there may be a place for it, eliciting overt responses from the viewer during a telecast is an expensive way to use tv time. The correct response has to be provided even if the response has been right; if it has been wrong, the correct answer will not tell the learner why; if he is uncertain he must revise what he has learnt, and not merely repeat an answer given to him. The teacher should be the best person to work with his or her own class, to adapt the suggestions in the teachers' notes to fit the ability of the class.

It was seen during school visits that enterprising teachers could use the programmes to stimulate useful speech practice. "Who was the fat man?" – "Bong." Pupils take over with "Who was the invisible man?" "Who fell to the ground?" etc. Mention must be made of one rather badly shot scene, which the production team hadn't the time to remake before it went on the air. The teacher herself was puzzled, and asked the class: "Why couldn't the clown lift the smallest and lightest basket?" It was a rural class but she was inundated by replies. "There was a stone...no, it was a nut....a string....I think there was a nail..." Tv-wise, the video was unsatisfactory, but it led to the best language stimulation we have yet encountered. For once, the class had been asked a real question, one that the teacher didn't have an answer to. Surely this must be a pointer to ELT Tv makers.

The examples mentioned above were not envisaged in the teachers' notes, as they were not part of the chosen structural scene. But implicit in the notes is the freedom of the teacher to exploit the programmes in any way he or she chooses. TESL lecturers in colleges have said these programmes would be suitable for language proficiency work at college level, to give opportunities for practice in other tenses or structural areas, such as "If he had done this instead of that....If he had not.....he would (not) have....." The Forms 1 and 2 English syllabus repeats the primary items in Unit form, so the programmes may be a basis of occasional work as they stand with perhaps additional incursions into higher taxonomy areas such as discussion of the plot, the quality of the acting, the evaluation of film techniques used? We can stand criticism, and even welcome it especially if it brings improvement to oral and writing work. Teachers, get your pupils to talk to each other, and write to us.

We fondly hope for a wider utilisation of our efforts. Here are 57 programmes for your classes to have fun with, ELTA people. You may find ways to use them that others have not thought of yet. Please let us know.

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