Film as (Con)Text: Using Visual Media in Russian Language and Culture Classes

You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are fuzzy. You are at a nightclub talking to a girl with a shaved head. The club is either Heartbreak or the Lizard Lounge. All might come clear if you could just slip into the bathroom and do a little more Bolivian Marching Powder. Then again it might not. [...] Somewhere back there you could have cut your losses, but you rode past that moment on a comet trail of white powder and now you are trying to hang on to the rush. Your brain at this moment is composed of brigades of tiny Bolivian soldiers. They are tired and muddy from their long march through the night. There are holes in their boots and they are hungry. They need to be fed. They need the Bolivian Marching Powder.


[...] Here, discordantly, in Eights Week, came a rabble of womankind, some hundreds strong, twittering and fluttering over the cobbles and up the steps, sightseeing and pleasure seeking, drinking claret cup, eating cucumber sandwiches, pushed in punts about the river, herded in droves to the college barges; greeted in the *Isis* and in the Union by a sudden display of peculiar, facetious, wholly distressing Gilbert-and-Sullivan badinage, and by peculiar choral effects in the College chapels. We were giving a ball. The front quad, where I lived, was floored and tented, palms and azaleas were banked around the porter’s lodge; worst of all, the don who lived above me had lent his rooms for a Ladies’ Cloakroom, and a printed notice proclaiming this outrage hung not six inches from my oak. No one felt more strongly about it than my scout.

Criteria for Using Visual Media in Language Teaching

Immediate Goals:
• Develop language learners into active learners within the limited timeframe of a standard university course
• Make authentic visual media essential components of the interactive FL classroom

A. Is Any Video "Good" Video?

Useful language learning video should have:

1. Desirable linguistic material
   • current
   • accurate (not prescriptive)
   • useful

2. High audio/visual correlation
   • video track is essential to complete understanding
   • video track facilitates comprehension of text
   • visuals may stand alone without text

3. Multiple "layers"
   • encourage (if not require) repeated viewings to understand
   • cultural literacy issues
   • paralinguistic elements (gestures, proxemics, body language, etc.)

4. High production values
   • present a complete discrete segment (beginning, middle, end)
   • compelling/entertaining
   • maintain interest of a native speaker/viewer
B. Exploitation of Video Materials

1. **Preview**
   Makes the material (linguistic and non-linguistic) of the video segment more readily accessible to the learner by:

   - Introducing new concepts (lexical, grammatical, functional, cultural, etc.) before the first viewing of the segment;
   - Providing background information to help learner develop native-like schemata or "prior text" to understand video material (basis for cultural literacy);
   - Allowing learner to apply native language strategies to new material;
   - Preparing the learner to comprehend the material without giving away the "punch" of the segment.

2. **Task Viewing**
   Guides the learner in "peeling" away the various layers of the video segment and discover and master the linguistic, paralinguistic, and cultural material contained in it by:

   - Requiring the learner to view and re-view the video material in order to solve the assigned task;
   - Focusing the learner's attention on relevant elements in the segment;
   - Organizing and structuring the viewing to make the material memorable and relevant, not testing his/her memory;
   - Maintaining the integrity of the original segment.

3. **Follow-Up**
   Helps the learner understand the broader application of the material covered in the segment by:

   - Adding to or building on the layers of information presented in the video;
   - Extending the frame of usage of the material already learned;
   - Providing additional material to complete or supplement the portrait created by the video material.

**Adjust the Task, Not the Text!**