
In Rebuttal: Mary Ann Lyman Responds to Robert Quinn's Review of Rick Altman's *Video Connection*

Editorial Note: *The Editors of J.E.T.T. welcome the opportunity to showcase opposing points of view. The following rebuttal will be most useful to those readers who are familiar with Robert Quinn's review of *The Video Connection: Integrating Video Into Language Teaching* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989). Quinn's review appeared in Volume 22, No. 2/3, Summer-Fall, 1989, beginning on page 17 of J.E.T.T.*

In Rebuttal

I could not disagree more with Robert Quinn's review of Altman's important contribution. Following this brief rebuttal of Quinn's arguments is my review of *The Video Connection: Integrating Video Into Language Teaching*. As readers will note, I reached a very different conclusion about the usefulness of Altman's contribution.

As Director of the Five Colleges Foreign Language Resource Center, presenter of numerous half-day workshops on video pedagogy and technology at national conferences, and courseware author of an interactive video program, I consider myself an experienced video user. As such, I found Altman's book extremely clear, insightful, and useful for faculty interested in incorporating video materials into the curriculum. Altman's practical suggestions and accompanying video clips to underscore major points are well conceived and concretely illustrative. This is certainly not a first or second draft effort, as Quinn has so cavalierly suggested.

Reading Altman's text has offered new insights into my teaching of *French in Action* (a video-based introductory language course authored by Pierre Capretz and Beatrice Abetti of Yale University), sharpened my acumen in the selection of video materials from satellite television, and improved my abilities in designing exercises to accompany video materials.

Interactivity Does Not Depend on Machines

While it is true that interactivity with computers is given scant mention in the final chapters of this text, Quinn misses the mark in attacking Altman so vehemently for this seeming omission. Altman has commercially designed and marketed videodisc materials and has contributed to an interactive software program to accompany the videodisc version of *Téledouzaine*. Knowing interactive video technology, he has deliberately chosen not to muddy the waters by treating concepts and pragmatics of video/computer interactivity. Altman has likewise resisted the temptation to make recommendations for using this authoring system or that one in this text. His book will be more timely and current for it.

After all, the Altman text is about video pedagogy and methods of approaching the curriculum from a new angle. Tangentially, in some laboratory applications, computers interacting with videodiscs may play an increasingly important role in out-of-class language instruction. Altman's main goal is to offer us practical ways of using videotape, which is, after all, the video technology that most of us

are familiar with in classroom applications. The principles of effective video use will carry over to any interactive system configuration. Quinn makes the mistake of focusing excessively and obsessively on the selection of particular vehicles for carrying out the message ("CALIS," SMART VCR's, etc.) Altman takes the higher ground and discusses principles which are likely to be around us a bit longer than the newest VCR which can be computer-controlled.

Classroom vs. Laboratory/Out-of-Class Video Use

Furthermore, I see no incongruity in Altman's suggesting that classroom video use should be limited to small segments under several minutes. If Quinn had read Altman's text more carefully, he would have noticed a predominant recurrent connection to the language laboratory, where students would have the possibility of seeing the entire video segment after having viewed and discussed a short video clip in class.

Technology in the Absence of Pedagogy is Meaningless

Altman's first chapter was one of my favorites, which is in direct opposition to Quinn's suggestion that Altman remove the chapter altogether. Quinn's odd lack of appreciation for theoretical issues is indicative of a few "techie" who have chosen to focus so intently on the newest and latest hardware solutions that they have forgotten to ask the question, "Why technology?" Had I written *The Video Connection*, I would have been tempted to expand upon rather than eliminate this chapter. I was personally looking for more of an expansion of the dialectic between Comprehension and Production, between Input and Output, from a theoretical viewpoint.

Mary Ann Lyman Reviews Rick Altman's The Video Connection

The video revolution is an undeniable part of our popular culture. The growing number of video rental outlets and the increasing shelf space of supermarkets and convenience stores devoted to video rental cassettes attests to the fact. Yet, a representative sampling of the shelves' video

offering shows very few useful materials for the teaching of foreign languages. Video viewing is largely a passive recreational activity, which is disturbing for those of us who would encourage our students to be interactive and proficient in verbal expression.

In contrast to the popular monolingual offerings of the video rental stores, feature-length high quality foreign films and authentic foreign language television programs can encourage listening comprehension and cultural understanding. Those of us who are convinced that video holds promise for language learning will reject passive video viewing in favor of a more creative approach, using video as a "spur" to encourage classroom discussion and communication in the target language.

Some Theoretical "Underpinnings"

Altman's book begins appropriately in Part I with the question, "What does video have to offer language education?" He considers the difficulties posed by recent and often incongruent teaching ideologies, such as grammar-translation, Total Physical Response (TPR), audiolingualism, etc. He focuses attention on the various constituencies of **language itself rather than any of the various teaching methods we use**. His diagrammatic, holistic model of language pedagogy relates to various aspects of language comprehension to the goals of language teaching (oral and written expression and culture). By dividing the task of language learning into six "aspects" (**sounds, segmentation, semantics, syntax, systems discourse, and systems of culture**), we are able to see how each of these can be accessed through the video medium and related pedagogical activities. Each of the six "s's" cited above is related very concretely to a short video clip which is included on the accompanying videocassette.

The strength of video as a medium rests on its ability to strike a delicate balance between *maximum contextualization* and *maximum control*, according to Altman, who bases these conclusions on cited research. (Indeed, among the useful qualities of this book are its excellent bibliography and appendices). Examples of the principles of **contextualization** and **control** are

also shown in the accompanying videocassette. Altman further situates the video movement within the proper historic and functional context and offers "an integrated approach to video pedagogy" in Chapter II. In this chapter, he moves from the casual, unplanned (and often serendipitous) use of video to a curriculum-driven, planned approach, replete with preparatory and follow-up activities.

Levels of Video/Student Interactions

Altman offers both theoretical and practical considerations for teachers in Chapter III. Irrespective of the approach a language teacher uses (grammar-based or functional/notional for example), a three-tiered layer of learner outcomes may be used. Altman's first layer reposes on **recognition**, which moves to a more active layer, **manipulation**. The final layer is more active: **production** of the language. Video usage is then directly related to these three stages of language development.

Consistent with the "developmental approach" is Altman's insistence that we not expect complete mastery of linguistic skills in a strictly hierarchical sense. At any given time, a student will exhibit **integrative skills**: Comprehension will grow in spurts and production will follow accordingly. The level of language presented to students will never be totally comprehensible but understanding will increasingly improve as students learn strategies for processing language (including the art of "gisting" and "skimming"). Altman's emphasis on **process** complements the proficiency movement's **product-oriented** approach.

Video: A Time and Purpose

Part II of Altman's book considers various language levels and the corresponding strategies, activities, materials, and mind-sets which accompany these levels. Lower-level composition, conversation, and special purposes courses all occupy an important place in the total curriculum and offer varying adaptive challenges

to the video neophyte. An emphasis is placed on the appropriate video choices for the various purposes, and concrete examples are again cited and underscored by the accompanying videocassette.

Part III offers practical considerations for those once-recalcitrant video users who have been convinced by Altman's preceding two sections. The chapter on video law describes the legal caveats and regulations of using off-the-air broadcasts, pre-recorded videocassettes, and videotape copying. Another chapter explains video technology in broad terms and offers suggestions for equipment choices and language laboratory procedures and arrangements. The final chapter in this section tells readers where to locate sources of authentic video.

Looking to the Future

Altman's conclusion leads us to the future (present) of videodisc and the difficulty of television (and hence, videodisc and tape) standardization. A descriptive model of an interactive educational video program is offered. To his credit, Altman continually refers back to the driving force of pedagogy as he considers the newer technological "break-throughs" offered at the Air Force Academy, Brigham Young University, the Defense Language Institute, MIT, the Monterey Institute of Foreign Studies, and the University of Iowa.

Another real strength of the Altman book is its clarity and simplicity. Altman writes well and his book makes very interesting reading. Combined with a technical "how-to" book, it could offer the neophile video user a complete Gestalt of video technology and pedagogy. With the mystique and hocus-pocus of video removed, Altman makes video accessible to us all, and in such a pleasant and interesting way. The use of the videocassette to underscore points in print is novel and could lead even the most die-hard traditionalist to some new perspectives in video pedagogy.

J.E.T.T. Contributor Profile

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