

## **Videotape as an Instructional Aid in Teaching German Grammar**

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### **Introduction**

Teachers of modern languages face a number of problems today in their classrooms that can be lessened through an understanding of how audio-visual technology can aid students to learn. Students who have grown up with television have great difficulty in the classroom where most of the instruction is verbal. In addition, student language capability varies. Some students are quick learners; others require concentrated effort and repeated practice before they can master the intricacies of grammar and usage. Students also need to review what they have learned to maintain this mastery.

For years I have been searching for ways to increase my teaching effectiveness so that my students can not only be motivated to learn German, but also can be afforded opportunities to learn outside the classroom. In 1972 an opportunity presented itself when the University announced that moneys were available for faculty instructional grants. I submitted a proposal to the committee requesting a grant to develop a series of videotapes on German grammar for beginning students. My proposal was funded and I began working with the University Instructional Television coordinator to develop the series. From the series that I had outlined, we agreed to do eight video lessons. Since I intended the tapes to be used by students, both for review and for remediation, each video tape was scripted so that thirty-eight grammatical units are taught as stand-alone lessons within the series. An outline of the eight tapes and their grammatical units can be seen in the following chart:

### **Beginning Grammar**

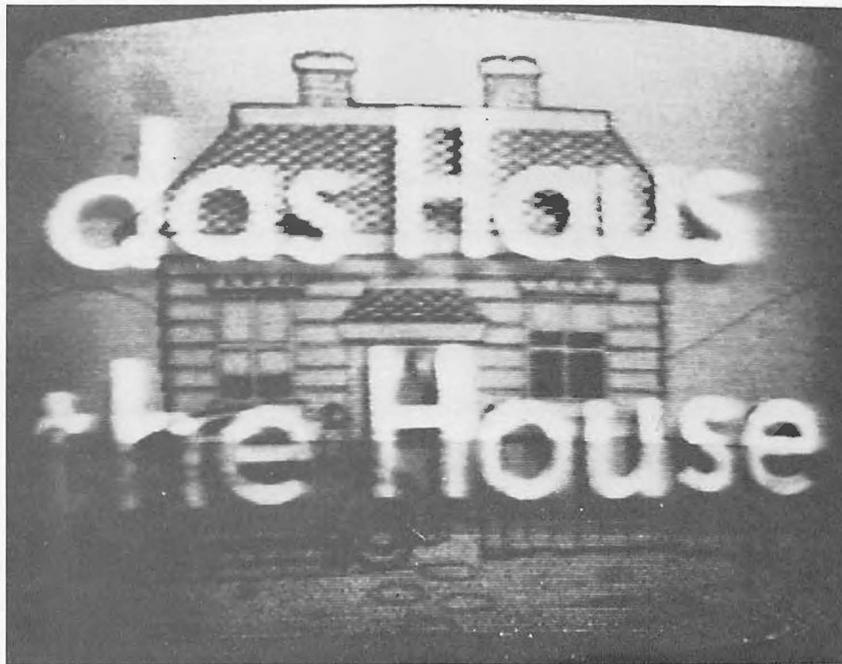
- Tape 1 Introduction, pronunciation, conjugation of a regular verb, personal pronouns.
- Tape 2 Conjugation of verbs in the present tense, to have and to be verbs, verbs with vowel change in the present tense. Questions, how to form a question, accusative case, imperative, dative case.
- Tape 3 Negation, plural form of German nouns, prepositions with the accusative case, prepositions with the dative case, prepositions with the dative and the accusative case, possessive adjectives, modal auxiliaries, genitive case, demonstrative pronouns.
- Tape 4 Adjective endings, past tense of regular verbs, past tense of irregular verbs, future tense, verbs with prepositions, separable prefixes and inseparable prefixes.
- Tape 5 Comparison of adjectives and adverbs, numbers, time, word order, reflexive verbs.
- Tape 6 Relative pronouns, active and passive. Subjunctive irrational, subjunctive indirect speech.
- Tape 7 Irregular verbs #1.
- Tape 8 Irregular verbs #2, irregular verbs #3.

The series was filmed in black and white, with myself as the TV personality. After the introduction to the series, however, my personality was reduced to a voice with cartoons and lettering taking over to present the grammar on the screen to my students. The cartoon art used in this series was the work of a student whom I caught "doodling" during one of my grammar lectures. His doodling consisted of a number of caricatures of me. Ordinarily I might have been offended by such activity, however, since I was searching for an artist to work on the video series, I asked my doodler if he would like to be the artist for the project. He agreed,



and produced over two hundred cartoons under my direction. For the text, we experimented with several lettering systems. First we tried felt letters on a contrasting felt background. However, this was time consuming. Next, we typed on cards, which were photographed as slides that were projected on a screen and then videotaped. With today's technology, we could now use the character generator.

In the spring semester of 1973, I placed my completed videotaped series in the University Media Resource Library for student use. I could now refer them there for independent study of any grammatical unit they needed. This meant that students could view any or all of the units outside of the classroom as many times as they wished. Since the library was open nearly seventy hours a week, it provided them with a great opportunity to study grammar. Just as some instructors assigned collateral reading for their courses, I assigned one or more of the tapes as collateral reading for my course.





During one semester, the eight individual tapes were viewed an average of twenty-seven times. Later, a series of advertisements in the campus newspaper reminded my students as well as alerted the rest of the campus community to the availability of the series in the library. The advertisement, through the use of questions, directed the viewer to the appropriate tape. Some examples follow below:

Did you forget your irregular German verbs? Take videocassette #124, part 11 - 13.

Do you want to study the adjective endings? Take videocassette #24, part 5.

Do you want to study the accusative case? Take videocassette #124, part 2.

Now, five years later, I am considering revising the series and producing it in color with exercises and tests, both diagnostic and mastery, available as part of the student learning process. This series of grammar lessons on videotapes seem to hold students' attention and to assist them in mastering the intricacies of German grammar. It has also provided me with another way to increase my effectiveness as a teacher.