TEACHING ENGLISH WITH FILM MATERIALS: PROMOTING SPEAKING IN EFL CLASSES

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Abstract In English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction, content-based language teaching is valuable for its dual focus on language and content; however, the lesson content remains underused as it is generally accepted without much analysis, and most of the attention goes to language development. Films provide materials to bridge this language-content gap as content can be analyzed before, during, and after viewing sessions. From an instructional perspective, film materials are especially important as authentic materials are scarce in EFL contexts; however, their value for speaking rests on the viewing approach used and their nature.

Introduction

One controversial issue in discussions of film viewing in English teaching has been the customary film viewing approaches focused on the curriculum (Stoller, 1988, 1995). Viewing films should promote discussion and the integration of paratexts for enhanced motivation and comprehension. On the one hand, many argue that course material activities and similar formats should remain the norm (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994; Wen-Cheng et al., 2011) On the other hand, others maintain that inhouse materials are more relevant for students because they are context-based and adaptation supports movie acceptance (Babaii & Sheikhi, 2018; Bori, 2022). My own opinion is that film paratexts (posters, trailers, and scripts) are authentic resources to be adapted for in-house speaking skill development and discussion. Questions are key to developing a comprehension of the resources involved in the viewing stages as they unveil the movie contents, narrative,

and characters in a discussion that relates to real life and resembles the movie-going experience (King, 2002).

Literature review

A previewing experience with posters and other film elements Film posters are unexplored resources that further film enjoyment and audience appeal through their profile-raising nature. Their helpfulness derives from their origin, as they are a tool of advertisers and communicators involved in show business and promotion (Grandbacka, 2016). Posters contain images, texts, and symbols designed to introduce a story, so they are inviting and engaging previewing elements from the movie theater venue. From a second language perspective, they also belong to the authentic printed materials category (Oura, 2001). Similarly, trailers are natural previewing elements appropriate for pedagogical attention that encapsulate a great deal of film information in less than three minutes. Intended to sell a film to captive audiences in theaters, they also invite audiences to learn a story through attention-grabbing snippets and it is a perfect segue into subtitle text and scripts. They are popular because of their upfront approach and access to vocabulary, dialogues, accents, and characters. Unfortunately, they are often set aside precisely because of their commercial and fast-paced nature. Regarding trailers, (Kernan 2004) explains, "While trailers are a form of advertising, they are also a unique form of narrative exhibition, wherein promotional discourse, and narrative pleasure and conjoined" (p. 1). Because of their richness, trailers also reveal elements of film narrative and genre that improve film comprehension. Film scripts are also potentially enriching for previewing, during viewing, and postviewing, supporting language comprehension and lexical memory. Scripts are especially useful for vocabulary study as they may come to us as ordinary subtitle texts, expanded scripts, or novelized versions (Iwasaki, 2011). Subtitle texts are printed versions of conversational exchanges; expanded scripts are similar to subtitle texts except for the inclusion of commentary in the form of footnotes. Novelized versions are scripts based on books and fiction that expand the character, plot, and setting information. In other words, foreign language learning contexts particularly

benefit from scripts and subtitle texts as resources to help students notice their communication gaps, discover new language patterns, and increase vocabulary. I propose using subtitle texts and not subtitled or captioned films because EFL students' limited exposure to spoken English limits their ability to listen and read without repetition. Texts can be pre-read and post-read whereas subtitled and captioned films require fast reading and good comprehension. Since this article's goal is enriching the viewing of feature films with authentic content for speaking, successful film viewing depends on strategies that facilitate speaking, a critical skill and one that takes longer to develop. In this article, I explain how to benefit from "printed" film scripts for speaking activities aimed at intermediate-level students through diverse questions: descriptive, inferential, and critical. Lastly, I raise awareness of pragmatic knowledge through opinions.

What film elements can we use from the movie-going experience?

Characters

They are the agents of film narratives that communicate filmmakers' values and vision. Their importance interacts with stardom, a social phenomenon comprising viewers' identification with social, gender, racial, roles, and behaviors (Villarejo 2007). Characters aid contextualization by improving viewers' comprehension of roles: protagonists and antagonists. Characters give the film a human face that transcends paratexts to include videogames, action figures, memorabilia, and acting. The following three websites are great resources for free high-quality posters from major film franchises containing known characters:

- https://mypostercollection.com/movie-posters/

- https://www.joblo.com/movies/

- http://www.impawards.com/

It is also worth exploring websites dedicated to releasing free trailers in our quest for major movie characters. These condensed movies bring characters to life and become the first contact with characters' strengths and weaknesses.

The following three websites offer free trailers:

• http://www.hd-trailers.net/

• https://www.traileraddict.com/

• https://www.firstshowing.net/

Next to posters and trailers, Websites like IMDB.com and Rotten Tomatoes.com offer movie synopsis and reviews from diverse audiences with and without spoilers. This is great information for character introduction and further discussion in class. Finally, many movie characters are originating from video games and vice versa.

Atmosphere

According to Filmsite.org, this is "any concrete or nebulous quality or feeling that contributes a dimensional tone to a film's action" (Dirks, n.d.). Filmsite.org's online glossary also provides some metaphoric examples: "spookiness, howling wind, searing heat, blinding light, a rain downpour, etc." (Dirks, n.d.). An often-overlooked film element, film atmosphere is used to instill emotional states, expectations, and notions in the audience. Also known as "film tone or mood", it is found along with story and genre classification in film reviews (Spadoni, 2020). Websites dedicated to movie reviews contain references to film atmosphere along with information about music, art, lighting, and art direction, the key material for viewers to speak about. These are excellent free online choices:

• The Movie Database https://www.themoviedb.org/

• Metacritic https://www.metacritic.com/

• Internet Movie Database https://www.imdb.com/

Storyline

Generally linked to atmosphere and genre, this is information which viewers need in order to define events as important or irrelevant to film comprehension. Film storyline or narrative is also offered on different websites dedicated to movie criticism from the viewer's perspective like IMDB and others. However, these are other great choices that deserve some attention because of their variety and relation to other media:

• https://rate.house/

• https://movielens.org/

Genre

Information about the genre is also available through movie rating/ comment websites. The best way to understand genre is through websites dedicated to the topic like:

• Tim Dirk's filmsite.org: (https://www.filmsite.org/filmgenres.html)

• Milne library: https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/exploring-movie-construction-and production/chapter/2-what-is-genre-and-how-is-it-determined/. These are two good sources to understand not only the genre but also sub-genres among other rather speculative topics related to the film. I advise Letterbxd.com (https://letterboxd.com/), a platform to post personal movie reviews, because of the possibility of engaging in film discussion and learning more about the topic. Film script text is available from websites such as:

• https://www.simplyscripts.com/a.html

 • https://imsdb.com/ (the internet movie script database) • https://scriptpdf.com/

Script text

They serve well to explain that incomplete clauses, chunked language, heads and tails, and subject repetition are acceptable in spoken grammar (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014). The film script is unaffected by speaking constraints that occur in everyday conversation, so this makes it unnatural compared to the real conversation; however, it is a second to none aid for noticing gaps and promoting fluency through repetitive reading and performing.

Why should we create speaking activities based on film materials?

Connecting film elements with the teaching of speaking requires using viewing resources to help learners notice gaps in their speaking. In general, paratexts expose learners to skilled speakers that raise their awareness of their current speaking skill to improve it (Thornbury, 2005). Likewise, Burns and Goh (2012) discuss that speaking skill development requires awareness of speaking features conducive to improved

speaking. In addition, Mishan and Timmis (2015) explain that noticing the gap is a pedagogical trend that detaches from the established PPP method so that learners obtain exposure to sophisticated speaking materials:

• exposure to the feature through a semi-scripted listening text

• global comprehension task on the listening text

• focus on the target feature (through repeated listening or use of the transcript)

• brief explanation of the feature and questions

• short controlled practice activity (Mishan & Timmis, 2015)

In addition, linking film elements and speaking requires activities that expose learners to speaking situations through scaffolds that enable them to outperform. For example, (Thornbury 2005, p. 62) suggests how learners may ideally notice gaps in their ability from an input source in three steps:

(1) performing by using their current ability first,

(2) watching/listening to a source to learn how to say things from an "expert" speaker a second time,

(3) and finally try saying an improved version that includes the "noticed" in two rounds.

Perhaps, the first time using the subtitle text as a scaffold, and a second time without support. In sum, he advises creating a Zone of Proximal Development similar to the one proposed by Lev Vygotsky. Moreover, fluency is another key component of the connection between film elements and speaking skill-building. (Nation 2009, p.116) explains that "pushed output" is the best way to turn receptive knowledge into productive use. Pushed output activities require learners to produce language based on input processing for the development of an interlanguage internal grammar (Adams, 2003; Erturk, 2013). Nation (2009) also discusses that effective pushed output requires diverse topics, discourse types, and performance conditions that favor planning for improved fluency and accuracy. Ultimately, he draws attention to retellings as an ideal way to rehearse and perform fluently, and he further advocates the benefits of repeated shortened

time performances to gain fluency. Finally, (Mishan & Timmis, 2015) also recommend task-based arrangements and repetition for improved fluency and accuracy. They propose cycles that comprise "reading, repeating, and performing" as key components for good speaking activities. However, the question remains "What exactly do learners need to learn about spoken English from film materials for enhanced viewing?". (Thornbury, 2005) advocates attention to communication strategies, discourse markers, language chunks, cultural information, stress, intonation, spoken grammar, production effects. Mishan and Timmis (2015) argue that a great deal of ELT materials excludes spoken grammar features and discourse types. In other words, they inform that spoken grammar and discourse genre are gaps to be cared for through speaking programs. Nation (2009) considers that speaking and output are ideal to turn receptive language knowledge into productive use. He further claims that diverse topics, discourse types, and performance conditions are conducive to improved speaking. In sum, connecting film elements, paratexts, and speaking activities should help learners speak beyond their current ability level. This is possible by helping them notice their limitations through comparisons with language models.

A note about teaching speaking online: The human factor The absence of a physical school environment, which directs and informs our teaching, compels organization and flexibility for our classes. There are three important points to consider for successful online lesson deployment:

1. Lessons have to be as student-centered as possible:

2. Their emotional and mental well-being is more important than ever

3. Motivation is key for task development.

Conclusion

Viewing the film in EFL classrooms provides listening input in the absence of enough speaking practice; however, the inclusion of paratexts and film scripts requires taking an interest in film and potential online resources for language teaching/ learning. The use of questions about paratexts as a way to enhance the viewing experience enriches

the discussion about movies in EFL classes, and it also makes viewing more enjoyable and similar to going to the movies. I hope this viewing model based on free and available online resources motivates teachers to watch films differently and get the best out of the film and the internet. In sum, adapted film materials are a way to keep students connected to English learning during online semesters away from schools and universities, so this is an ideal assignment model for school lockdowns in the absence of face-to-face classes.

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