

Teaching English with Movie Screenplays: A Four Skills Approach

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Introduction

One of the challenges ESL/EFL teachers face is finding ways to provide students with rigorous study experiences that are also practical, meaningful and enjoyable. Traditional textbook-centered grammar and translation methods have been criticized for quite some time as being out of step with current research into the nature of second language learning and acquisition (see Brown, 2000; Krashen, 2004; Taguchi, 2002). There appears to be ample evidence that in order for formal grammar and vocabulary study to be effective, there must also be opportunities for students to practice the four skills of language extensively, engage authentic cultural materials, and take away from these experiences learning strategies that they will be able to employ independently, in the future (Chase, 2000; Krashen, 2004; Malcolm, 2004; Nunan, 1996).

For decades, language teachers all over the world have been attempting to enrich their classes by introducing students to authentic media, such as movies, music and television programs (see Danan, 2004; Eken, 2003; Gardner & Garcia, 1996; Qiang, Hai, & Wolff, 2007; Zhao, 2003). Since the late 1980s many Japanese EFL teachers have experimented in their classrooms with closed-captioned videos and movies (Kikuchi, 1997). Originally designed for deaf and hearing-impaired viewers, closed-captioned videos provide students with onscreen English text, closely

matching a movie's audio. In 1995, interest in providing Japanese students with greater access to movies, as part of their English education, led to the formation of ATEM (Association for Teaching with English Movies) by EFL teachers here in Japan (Kikuchi, 1997).

In recent years, the introduction of DVD digital technology has made foreign language teaching and learning even easier. DVDs are more flexible and versatile than closed-captioned videos, with multi-language audio and subtitle capabilities that can be employed by teachers in the classroom, as well as students at home. These user-friendly technologies are providing language learners with new opportunities to study authentic communicative English extensively and practice their language skills (Chase, 2006; Keene, 2006). The greatest challenge with authentic cultural materials, such as movies, is that the language being used is often far above the comprehension level of most second-language students (Danan, 2004; Grgurovic & Hegelheimer, 2007; Kikuchi, 1997; Krashen, 2004).

Fortunately, along with the digitalized technology of DVDs, another recent development here in Japan has been the widespread availability of translated movie screenplays. Since the late 1980s Japanese screenplay publishers have been creating student-friendly translations of film scripts that learners can use as an aid to increase their comprehension (Matsuzawa, 2007). When a student buys a movie screenplay published in Japan, they frequently acquire both the complete English text and a side-by-side Japanese translation. In many cases the screenplay translators are groups of Japanese teachers who work together to make the movie dialogue even more comprehensible by providing additional language and cultural information in the margins (Chase, 2006).

Many screenplays published here in Japan are divided into ten chapters, making them suitable course material for a thirteen week college semester. These information-rich texts provide a potentially potent

teaching tool for educators, as well as being an interesting and in-depth learning resource for motivated students. This paper will describe a teaching method for bringing together these two powerful resources - movie DVDs and screenplay translations - in a manner that can assist students in developing their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The movie study approach presented here is one that my students have helped to develop by providing extensive written feedback, most of them judging it to be useful and enjoyable (Chase, 2006). Some of their comments will be shared in this paper, so as to convey a sense of the students' views.

The first section of this paper will provide some of the background and rationale for the four skills approach presented here. Next is a description and review for each of the seven movie screenplays I've been using with my students. Following that, the eight steps of this teaching method will be described in greater detail, with explanations given for the purpose of each step in the process. Finally, I will provide a summary of what has been learned from this experience, with an emphasis on the potential movies have, as a focus of study for EFL students.

Pairing Movie DVDs and Translated Screenplays

Why choose a movie for students to study? To begin with, the stories of movies can hold the attention of young learners because they are observing individuals facing challenges, communicating skillfully and dealing with life-like situations. When a suitable movie is chosen students are able to identify with the fictional characters they are watching, and are better able to make sense out of the language being used (Fukunaga, 1998; Keene, 2006). A great deal of vocabulary and grammar taught in formal ESL/EFL textbooks is academic or decontextualized (Brown, 2000; Krashen, 2004; Taguchi, 2002). On the other hand, when used for communication purposes, language is embedded in contexts and anchored in specific

cultural situations (Ford & Lerner, 1992; Fukunaga, 1998; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Movies provide a window into foreign cultures, offering students visual clues and information that helps them to comprehend the complexity of language use (Fukunaga, 1998; Gardner & Garcia, 1996; Keene, 2006). Movies provide role models of native speakers who are using English proficiently to communicate with each other. Repeated viewing improves listening skills, while time spent with subtitles and texts challenges students to practice their reading skills (Chase, 2006; Kikuchi, 1997).

The teaching model that will be presented here is congruent with a communicative approach to language teaching (Brown, 2000; Taguchi, 2002), as well as research into learner autonomy (Nunan, 1996), and human motivation (Dweck, 1975; Ford, 1992). Likewise, numerous language educators have noted how giving time to the study of movies is supported by Stephen Krashen's *input theory*, which stresses the importance of providing students with contextualized and comprehensible language input (Caimi, 2006; Danan, 2004; Keene, 2006; Qiang et al., 2007). Based on research evidence in the field of second language acquisition, Krashen (2004, p. 1) proposes "that we acquire language when we understand messages, when we understand what people tell us and when we understand what we read."

It should be noted that the teaching method described in this paper requires concerted effort on the students' part. They must study the screenplays carefully and practice their English skills between classes if they wish to improve. Young people who lack basic English skills or do not wish to do any preparation for their classes may not benefit as much from this approach. One of my students described the importance of effort in this way:

"I believe my English improved as compared with before. It's very interesting and effective to learn English with movie DVDs and screenplay. But it needs some time to practice except for class. The way of using time is key to learn, I think... In class, I have to learn and practice regularly. I think it's effective for hard workers, that is, it depends on students because the way is good."

Background of Four Skills Approach to Movie Study

Since 1996 I have been using movie screenplays and DVDs to teach English to undergraduate students at Seinan Gakuin University and Kyushu University, in Fukuoka, Japan. The students at Seinan University have been English literature and language majors. The students at Kyushu University have come mostly from engineering, law, business and economics departments. I began by developing classes with the screenplay for the movie *Ghost* (Rubin, 1990). Over time, as my students started to express enthusiasm with the four skills approach we were using, I began to experiment with other movies for which screenplay translations were available.

When selecting a film and screenplay, there were certain qualities that I felt were essential. First, it had to be interesting for both male and female students. Second, the movie should contain non-offensive and useful language which students would be able to hear again if they watched similar movies, and that they could use freely when they had an opportunity to communicate with foreigners. Third, the film should communicate good values and positive social messages. Fourth, when possible, the movies should deal with current issues in the world, or important cultural themes. Fifth, the majority of students should judge the film to be interesting and enjoyable, increasing the likelihood that they would watch it again on their own, after finishing the course. This point is important because learners

could lose their newly-gained vocabulary if they did not repeatedly return to the movie in the future (Chase, 2006).

Finally, the movies selected should be enjoyable for the teacher, films that can be watched over and over again with students, without losing interest. Movies that initially fit all of the above criteria were *Ghost* (Rubin, 1990), *I am Sam* (Johnson & Nelson, 2001), *Independence Day* (Devlin & Emmerich, 1998), *Stuart Little* (Shyamalan, 1999), *Stuart Little 2* (Rubin, 2003), *Back to the Future* (Gale, 1989), and *Ice Age* (Berg, Wilson, & Ackerman, 2004). These movies were selected for language content, narrative messages, cultural themes, and their potential to keep students motivated and interested. A short review of each movie screenplay, with an emphasis on its strengths and weaknesses, is given below.

Ghost

For the first few years that I experimented with this approach, students read the screenplay for *Ghost* (Rubin, 1990). Combining romance, drama, humor and suspense, the movie would usually captivate students' interest. There are a number of business and banking situations, introducing useful banking vocabulary such as "withdrawal" (引き出し), "deposit" (預け入れ), "transfer" (振り込み) and "savings account" (普通預金). At the same time, the themes of ghosts and death provided students with an opportunity to explore topics that are seldom addressed directly in EFL classes. There is some offensive language in the movie, which is one of the reasons I began to experiment with other films. Sometimes I would show them scenes from films with similar "ghost" themes, such as *Ghostbusters* (1984), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), or *Flatliners* (1989).

After September 11, 2001, the movie provided an opportunity to teach about the terrorist attack that destroyed the World Trade Centers in downtown New York City, not far from many of the locations where *Ghost*

was filmed. When discussing the 9/11 tragedy I would make extensive use of a music DVD called *America: A Tribute to Heroes* (2001). The DVD honors the people who died on September 11th and includes impressive live performances by several English speaking musicians, most notably Faith Hill, U2, Alicia Keys, Billy Joel, Bon Jovi and Mariah Carey. The DVD also features English language subtitles, which make the lyrics much easier for students to understand.

Back to the Future

I have used the movie and screenplay for *Back to the Future* (Gale, 1989) at least once every semester for the last six years. The story provides viewers with an opportunity to observe differences between 1950s and 1980s American culture. Students are very interested in the way language is used by the main characters in the different time periods. They are able to compare the two historical periods to their lives at the present time, and are able to identify with the challenges faced by the main character, Marty.

The narrative theme of a teenager who travels back in time, running into his parents when they were his age, is very interesting for students. In their written essays, students often imagine what it would be like to travel into the past and meet their own parents. The movie also contains a very important message, that our future is created by our efforts in the present, and that if we are courageous and do our best we will shape our futures in a positive way (Chase, 2006). This message is especially important for young language learners who could find unexpected doors opening for them in the future, if they make an effort to master English, now.

During the course of the semester, we often examine American high schools and teen culture, giving students a chance to think about how it differs from what they've experienced in Japan. Sometimes we look at school scenes from movies such as *Spiderman* (2002), *Sky High* (2005) or

School of Rock (2003). At Kyushu University, where most of the students in class are male, I have used *Back to the Future* exclusively. It's challenging for them, but they report that it is very enjoyable, with many commenting that they noticed a definite improvement in their listening skills. As regards time management, students often commented that the first chapter of the screenplay is too long for them to complete in one class. Since last year I have divided it in half, taking two weeks to complete the chapter.

Stuart Little and Stuart Little 2

The screenplays for *Stuart Little* (Shyamalan, 1999) and *Stuart Little 2* (Rubin, 2003) have been extremely popular with Seinan University students. I usually show the first *Stuart Little* movie to freshmen, as it is probably the easiest of the films mentioned here. Most of the dialogue in both movies is clear, naturalistic and very useful. There are many cultural themes that can be discussed with students, such as how Mr. & Mrs. Little communicate as a married couple, life in New York City, the issue of adoption, and the challenges Stuart faces just trying to stay alive. There is a lot of cultural humor that students enjoy, which they would probably not understand if they did not have the screenplay translations and a native speaker's explanations to help them.

During the semester I usually present students with maps of New York City, and point out the different locations where scenes were filmed. I also discuss the 9/11 tragedy, especially when we watch *Stuart Little 2*, which was filmed not long after New York was attacked. It's one of the first Hollywood films to repeatedly show the city's skyline without the WTC buildings. As with *Ghost*, whenever the 9/11 tragedy is discussed I usually show selected songs from the music DVD of *America: Tribute to Heroes*. One challenge with the *Stuart Little* movies is that most students initially have difficulty understanding the speech and humor of the Littles' talking

house cat, Snowbell. As they are able to understand his words better, many students become big fans of the fictional character.

I am Sam

Most students have responded very favorably to the movie *I am Sam* (Johnson & Nelson, 2001). The language used by characters at the beginning of the film is rather easy to understand. Sam and his closest friends are mentally handicapped, so they speak slowly and simply. Sam's daughter Lucy is played by the young actress Dakota Fanning, whom female students often describe as "cute" or "かわいい." When the lawyer character, Rita, comes into the story, we are introduced to some complicated legal vocabulary and courtroom scenes. I often do a special lesson on legal terms such as "client" (依頼人), "objection" (異議有り), "sustained" (認めます), "witness" (証人) and "judge" (裁判官). Students usually report that the legal language and topic are very interesting. There are many popular movies and dramas that include such dialogue and scenes. Recently a number of students have reported that they enjoy the television drama *Prison Break* (2005). I also sometimes show courtroom scenes from the pilot of the TV drama *Ally McBeal* (1997) and the movie *Legally Blonde* (2001). Knowing that they can hear the same legal language in many other movies frequently heightens their interest.

Another positive feature of the movie is that the lead character, Sam, often makes reference to the music of John Lennon and the Beatles. During the semester, a teacher can introduce the lyrics of songs that will be heard in the background, and play the music in class. I often encourage students to get the movie's soundtrack CD and use the Beatles' music for extra listening practice. Most students have been very pleased with this film as a focus for intensive English study. Quite a few have written afterwards that it has become one of their all-time favorite movies.

Independence Day

The screenplay for *Independence Day* (Devlin & Emmerich, 1998) borrows themes from H.G. Wells' classic science-fiction story *The War of the Worlds* (Wells, 1898). The movie is fast paced, containing humor, irony and interesting dialogue. There are racial and ethnic themes that are raised, as well as issues such as the need for cooperation among all the people of the Earth. The film shows the optimism and bravery of Americans when faced with danger. Some of the language is extremely difficult, initially, dealing with Washington politics, space exploration and the American military. Many students gradually become interested as they gain a better understanding of words and topics that will help them to understand news magazines such as TIME and Newsweek, as well as the news broadcasts of the BBC and CNN.

The movie offers an opportunity to explore American UFO folk history and the science fiction genre in Hollywood films. To provide greater background, teachers can introduce students to Internet websites describing the infamous *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast of 1938, and the first *War of the Worlds* film made in 1953. Probably the greatest difficulty with *Independence Day* is that there are many minor characters in the story and the specialized vocabulary is extremely challenging. Students who are not interested in current world events or science fiction movies are often less motivated to study the film. For this reason I usually play highly difficult scenes with Japanese subtitles the week before I ask students to study the screenplays. I would not recommend *Independence Day* to teachers who want to try the strategies described here for the first time.

Ice Age

In contrast to *Independence Day*, the screenplay for *Ice Age* (Berg et al., 2004) is one of the least difficult for students. The chapters are short, with

less vocabulary to study. There are three main characters, so it is usually easiest to divide students into groups of two or three people during scene-reading activities. The film deals with issues of nature and the environment, so the class provides an excellent opportunity for students to explore environmental topics such as species extinctions, deforestation and global warming. Usually, after presenting key terms related to environmental problems in class, I ask students to do research on their own, using the Internet. They then do short reports on these topics, and share their personal opinions on important global issues.

While most students initially expect *Ice Age* to be a children's movie, they are pleasantly surprised when they find that much of the dialogue is written at an adult level. Irony and sarcasm are used frequently by the characters in the film. It is often difficult to translate this kind of language into Japanese, but students get satisfaction when they are able to understand American humor in English, directly. The visual clues and body language in the movie, as well as the Japanese explanations in the screenplay, help them to do this. One of my students described it this way:

"These practice did help me and my English skills, actually. For example, not just only listening, but also watching their faces and reading. If I had only radio or something, I would not improve my skill any more. Without visuals, I couldn't keep practicing, because of the difficulty. Using DVDs, I often catch these situation and I got English sentence naturally. I love movies and music so I want to use them in my future. Of course, the choice of movie that's most important I feel."

Teaching with Movie Screenplays: A Four Skills Approach

The next segment of this paper presents the four skills teaching approach that I use with students. Each week the same eight steps are followed (see box below), providing learners with opportunities to practice their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. In this section each of the steps will be examined closely, with emphasis given to related research and theoretical issues from the fields of language teaching and second language acquisition.

Teaching with Movie Screenplays: A Four Skills Approach

Step One (Listening & Reading Practice): Students preview the movie scenes they will be studying for homework.

Step Two (Reading Practice): Students have one week to study the movie scenes, using the English screenplay and Japanese translation to assist them.

Step Three (Listening & Speaking Practice): On the next day of class students begin with free English conversation practice.

Step Four (Listening & Reading Practice): Speaking in English, the teacher reviews the movie dialogue, presenting important cultural and linguistic information.

Step Five (Listening, Reading & Speaking Practice): Students read the movie dialogue aloud in small groups, each student playing the role of one or more characters in the story.

Step Six (Listening & Reading Practice): The week's movie scenes are shown again, with English language subtitles.

Step Seven (Listening & Reading Practice): Next week's scenes and related topics are presented.

Step Eight (Writing Practice): Students are asked to write a weekly report about their movie practice and study.

Step One: Students preview the movie scenes they will be studying

Before they are assigned any homework, students watch the scenes that they will be studying during the week. If the dialogue is not too far beyond their language ability, the film is shown with English subtitles. For scenes that are very difficult to understand, Japanese subtitles are used, to facilitate comprehension of meaning. Often, after this viewing, I will ask the students how much of the movie English they could understand. Responses will typically range between 30% to 60% comprehension, for scenes watched without any preparation. I then tell them that they will see the same scenes again next week, so they should study the screenplay on their own to raise their level of comprehension.

Showing the movie scenes before asking students to study them provides visual information that will aid their understanding of the screenplay. One thing I discovered was that by continuously presenting students with unfamiliar visual material they become aware of the difference in comprehension between scenes they have prepared for and those seen without any preparation. Over time, many students become motivated to study harder, realizing that they will have a second chance to see the scenes, and that they can improve their comprehension levels by their own efforts.

One of the goals of this approach is to strengthen students' *self-efficacy beliefs* (Bandura, 1986), the confidence they have about their ability to improve their English skills. Providing them with opportunities to see the impact of their own efforts can increase their motivation to try harder when faced with similar challenges, in the future (Chase, 2000). Written feedback obtained from students over the years has indicated that in many cases this has happened. Each semester there are large numbers of students who report that they have become more confident in their abilities and more motivated to use movies to study English, on their own.

Step Two: Students have one week to study the movie screenplay

By providing students with a translated movie screenplay as the class textbook, the teacher gives them a useful resource to help them understand the language and culture presented in the movie. Divided into ten chapters, the screenplays described in this paper provide the entire English text of the movie, as well as side-by-side Japanese translations and specific information on cultural background, vocabulary and useful phrases. Often I tell the students that I am not their only teacher in this class, that there was a team of Japanese teachers who put time into translating the movie's dialogue and providing them with extensive cultural and linguistic information (Chase, 2006).

Students are advised to read the screenplay very slowly at first, using the Japanese translations to assist them, so that the meaning of English words can be understood. Conscientious learners will often underline or highlight difficult words so that they can review them again later. After completing their initial study, I advise students to read through each week's chapter a second time, speaking the words aloud. This practice is optional, but students who have tried it reported that it was very helpful. It most probably helps them to strengthen the connections between printed and vocalized language in their brains. It should be noted that initially some students are not motivated to do the work requested of them. Over time, however, as they hear from peers that these methods are helpful, they often become more motivated to make a greater effort and try these strategies.

Finally, I advise students to re-read the new and difficult phrases one more time right before our class. This gives them an opportunity to focus attention on the most difficult words before watching the movie. While this extra reading is not required, many students have mentioned that it has been quite helpful. Watching the film each week provides them with an

opportunity to assess their own efforts and gradually improving abilities. Students frequently notice over time that the more effort they make to study the screenplay translations and prepare before class, the better they are able to understand the language spoken in the movie. Many students who participated in these movie study classes reported that the translated materials and preparation activities helped to increase their confidence and comprehension. They looked upon the movie viewing experience as an enjoyable challenge.

A study of university students in China (Qiang et al., 2007) uncovered a similar pattern. It was found that pre-teaching important vocabulary on the same day, just prior to viewing, was not enough. Students needed to be given the information well in advance, so that they had time to study and prepare carefully. When the film was finally shown, classes that had prepared in advance were much more attentive and watched the movie carefully. Conversely, in classes where students had not prepared ahead of time, large numbers were observed sleeping, talking or using their cell phones.

One of the goals of this type of course is to help students develop greater autonomy and take more responsibility for their language learning. As Krashen (2004, p. 6) describes, "We don't need return business in the language education profession. Our goal in foreign language pedagogy is to bring students to the point where they are autonomous acquirers, prepared to continue to improve on their own."

While many proponents of communicative language teaching tend to discourage reliance on translations of material, there is evidence that bilingual support materials can play an important role in facilitating learner comprehension (Gardner & Garcia, 1996; Grgurovic & Hegelheimer, 2007). Research in the area of memory processing indicates that translations can be very helpful, especially with highly complex material that is

far above a learner's present level of ability (Danan, 2004). Most promising are side-by-side translations such as those provided by screenplays available in Japan. These kinds of "paired equivalents" appear to assist in cognitive processing, thereby resulting in improved second language recognition and recall (Danan, 2004, Hummel, 1995). While it might be a mistake to rely on these translations alone, when accompanied by the visual and audio information of a movie, the translations appear to be quite helpful.

Step Three: Small group English conversation practice

On the day of class, students are first asked to form small groups and speak freely in English. This gives learners a chance to use the language for real communication. They are free to choose the topic of their conversations but they are expected to speak in English, only. The free speaking activity helps them to warm up and relax. The hardest part of the course is the preparation they are being asked to do on their own. Proponents of communicative language teaching frequently emphasize how important it is for students to feel comfortable with English, providing them with opportunities to actively use the language in order to communicate with others (Brown, 2000; Christopher & Ho, 1996; Ellis, 2005; Moss, 2005; Nunan, 2005; Taguchi, 2002). During this free conversation time, students usually ask one another questions related to their daily lives. They try to find out what's new, what people did last weekend or plan to do during the next weekend. While students are talking, their teacher can walk around the room to speak with students and make sure they are not using Japanese.

Step Four: Speaking in English, the teacher reviews the movie dialogue

After students have finished their English conversations, I then review

the scene dialogue for the day, explaining interesting language and providing background information related to cultural matters. This is a very important part of the lesson, where both the teacher's and students' roles are crucial. My ability to make this step interesting has depended on extensive written feedback from students, each semester. In the early years, students often looked bored when I reviewed the movie dialogue. Many would actually fall asleep. I provided too much information, on words and topics that were not interesting for them. As I collected more and more feedback from students, I was able to tailor my presentation to focus on parts of the script that previous students had described as being funny, interesting, or difficult to comprehend. Nowadays they usually laugh, smile, and look noticeably more attentive.

As mentioned earlier, students are interested by the use of irony and sarcasm in movies. For example, with the movie *Back to the Future* (Gale, 1989) the word "perfect" is used two ways in the opening chapter, both normally and ironically. We first hear the word used in typical fashion, by the character Doc, to signify that his clock experiment was successful (Gale, 1989, p. 12). Later, after arriving home and seeing that Biff has crashed his father's car, Marty says, "Perfect, just perfect" with an angry voice (Gale, 1989, p. 24). His tone of voice and the situation make the sarcastic meaning of the word clear. Without this visual and audio information the word's ironic meaning would be impossible to ascertain.

Also, in the same chapter (p. 14) Marty says, "Oh, yes, sir" to Mr. Strickland, the high school principal, with a sarcastic tone. Strickland tells him that he has an "attitude problem," which helps to highlight this issue of ironic word usage. A few minutes later Marty's girlfriend Jennifer says the word "terrible" in a soft sexy tone (p. 20), as she leans forward to kiss him. Students in my classes have been fascinated by the creative way words are being used in these scenes. Such inventive language use is quite common

in Hollywood films, although usually difficult to translate when subtitles are provided in Japanese.

Snowbell in *Stuart Little*, Marty in *Back to the Future*, Manny in *Ice Age*, Whoopi Goldberg's character in *Ghost*, and Will Smith's character in *Independence Day*, all use sarcasm with great frequency. It's probably one of the most popular ways of generating humor in American movies. The problem is such humor doesn't translate easily. Irony and sarcasm, especially, require careful attention to voice tone and observation of situational circumstances to be understood correctly.

One essential point here, that students often come to recognize, is the relationship between listening skill and comprehension. Listening skill develops through practice, it involves the ability to recognize words being said and catch the sounds in your mind quickly. Comprehension involves understanding the meaning of words, which requires careful observations, background information and reflection on how language is used in real situations and cultural contexts (Furstenberg & Levet, 2001; Krashen, 2004). One skill is to be able to recognize words and phrases in our minds, another to understand what they signify. In order for a language to be successfully mastered and understood, the two must be developed together.

As mentioned earlier, to help the students understand the cultural background of language used in movies the Japanese screenplay translations are absolutely essential. Often the translators have noticed things that the students and I have missed. Also, without their assistance it would be difficult for me to explain the deeper meaning of the language being spoken in movies. To achieve genuine comprehension, students must have access to both cultural knowledge and situational circumstances (Keene, 2006; Krashen, 2004).

Step Five: Students read the movie dialogue aloud in small groups

After the chapter's script has been outlined, students are asked to form groups once again and read the dialogue together. This role-playing activity gives them a chance to speak the text aloud and hear the words one more time prior to viewing. One of the challenges for the teacher is to divide up the roles so that groups of three to four students can play all the parts effectively. For certain scenes, it is often best to put the students into pairs. This allows for a maximum amount of speaking practice for each student.

Decisions about the number of students in each group and the assignment of roles are best made by the teacher before class. I usually begin by noting the lead roles in each scene and then determining whether the leads are onscreen simultaneously. In the movie *Ice Age* there are three lead roles so groups of three students usually work out quite well. The *Stuart Little* movies have many ensemble situations, where three to four readers are optimal. *Back to the Future* is more complex, with the ideal number of readers for the movie varying from scene to scene. *Independence Day* has a great number of small parts, which has been confusing for students.

An essential decision in relation to scene readings is whether or not the narration segments will be read aloud. As mentioned before, for the first few years that I experimented with movie screenplays, I used the script for the movie *Ghost*. At that time one student was always asked to read the part of the narrator, describing the scene and action. After a while I eliminated the reading of the narration aloud, as it seemed to slow down the pace of scene readings and students disliked reading that part. Students are still encouraged to read screenplay narrations for homework but they are no longer expected to read that part aloud in class.

Step Six: Movie scenes are shown with English language subtitles

Finally, after much preparation, the movie scene is shown, with English subtitles. Showing a foreign language film with the same language in subtitles has many potential benefits. The greatest challenge is that the speed of speaking and the vocabulary used will be beyond students' levels of ability, and they will feel discouraged. This is why so much preparation is required beforehand. There is ample research evidence to suggest that if the language is too advanced, students unfamiliar with it will not be able to keep up (Danan, 2004). Providing access to a translated version of the movie screenplay, as well as time to study it, gives them all the information they need in order to understand the scene. It is up to students, of course, to make use of the resources they have.

Danan (2004), in a careful review of studies involving both second-language and native-language subtitling, found that both had their advantages. Native-language translations increase comprehension, because they help students understand what is being said. The only potential problem is that students are so busy reading and thinking in their native language that they are not paying full attention to the English audio.

English subtitles help students to focus their attention on the language being spoken. They provide students with *bimodal input* (Danan, 2004). Text and audio are delivering the same information to the brain via two pathways, the eyes and ears. English language subtitles "may help to make the audio input more intelligible by bridging the gap between reading comprehension skills, which are usually more developed, and listening comprehension." (Danan, 2004, pp. 69-70; see also Garza, 1991). Similar findings have been reported by Brown (in press), regarding the relationship between extensive reading and listening skills. Students who have a choice between reading text, listening to it, or doing both at the same time, are most likely to choose the simultaneous input.

In certain cases English language subtitles help to make the dialogue clearer, because the actors themselves are speaking too quickly or in low voices. An example of this would be the opening dialogue of Chapter 5, from *Back to the Future* (Gale, 1989, p. 92):

Marty: Whoa, they really cleaned this place up. Looks brand new.

Doc: Now remember, according to my theory, you interfered with your parents first meeting. If they don't meet, they won't fall in love. They won't get married and they won't have kids. That's why your older brother's disappearing from that photograph. Your sister will follow and unless you repair the damage, you'll be next.

Marty: That sounds pretty heavy.

Doc: Weight has nothing to do with it.

In this scene the actor playing Doc talks quickly and delivers too much information for a second-language learner to comprehend. The audio for Marty's voice on the DVD is low, so it is very hard to hear. Their brief conversation is very funny, however, and conveys important information, which sets the foundation for a second joke concerning the meaning of the word "heavy" later on (Gale, 1989, p. 96). With the assistance of the screenplay, their teacher's explanation, and the English subtitles, students are better able to comprehend what is being said. Many of them will laugh while watching this scene, because they "get" the joke:

Doc: This is more serious than I thought. Apparently your mother is amorously infatuated with you instead of your father...

Marty: Whoa, this is heavy.

Doc: There's that word again "heavy". Why are things so heavy in the future? Is there a problem with the earth's gravitational pull?

Step Seven: Next week's scenes and related topics are presented

Students are once again shown the scenes that they will be studying for the following week. I also use the free time at the end of class as an opportunity to answer student questions, and present other material related to the movie's themes. For example, I may play Beatles songs related to *I am Sam*, or show music videos that were done as tributes to the victims of the September 11th tragedy. Next semester I plan to show scenes about global warming, from Al Gore's movie *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), to classes watching *Ice Age*. I will also show songs from the Disney movie *High School Musical* (2006), to students studying *Back to the Future*.

A rationale for presenting students with related cultural resources and information is provided by the idea that *narrow input* helps language learners practice and retain the vocabulary they are studying (Krashen, 2004). By staying focused on a particular theme or topic, students have the opportunity to experience the new vocabulary being used in a variety of situations. This approach differs from the survey method of language teaching, which presents students with a wide range of vocabulary and topics but does not explore any of them in depth (Krashen, 2004).

Step Eight: Students write weekly reports about their movie study

As part of their homework, students are asked to write an essay describing their movie study for the week, as well as interesting things they learned from the screenplays and class lectures. Essays are usually collected once each month. This feedback is crucial for the teacher. By reading the students' opinions, I am able to adjust the class for students in the following semester. In the case where they view music videos or scenes from other movies, I generally ask for feedback at the end of class, with a show of hands. This allows me to present new material and find out immediately whether students found it interesting.

One thing I have discovered over the years is that Japanese students often hold strong opinions about many topics, but they need time to put their ideas into English. Giving them a week to write down and share their thoughts has worked very well. On the few occasions when I have asked them to give their opinions verbally, in class, there are very few who will speak out. By presenting their ideas and opinions in written form, they have a chance to practice their writing skills as a means of communication. Since I use these written reports as material for class grades and assessments, the students usually do their best to communicate their ideas in this manner.

Summary and Conclusion

Looking back over the last ten years, the challenge I faced as a teacher was deciding how best to make use of the resources and knowledge I had, in order to create lessons that would motivate students and help them to learn English. As numerous educators have discovered, understanding how to create powerful learning experiences for students requires continuous trial and error (Hopfenberg et al., 1992; Qiang et al., 2007). New technologies such as DVDs, computers and the Internet bring with them as many challenges as opportunities (Chase & Alexander, 2007; Zhao, 2003). It is not enough simply to employ a new method or technology of teaching; that method must be applied creatively and successfully (Eken, 2003; Keene, 2004; Nunan, 1996). As has been pointed out by Zhao (2003, p. 8), "the effects of any technology on learning outcomes lie in its uses. A specific technology may hold great educational potential, but, until it is used properly, it may not have a positive impact on learning. Thus, assessing the effectiveness of a technology is in reality assessing the effectiveness of its uses rather than the technology itself."

The idea of using movies to help students learn foreign languages is

not new. Films have employed subtitles for decades, thereby allowing viewers to understand the meaning of foreign movies in their own language. What is relatively new is the idea of using "same language" captions and subtitles so that learners can both read and hear a new language at the same time. This method first caught the interest of educators here in Japan in the early 1980s, as closed captioning for the hearing-impaired became a common feature of popular videos (Kikuchi, 1997). The resource capacity of movies as a language teaching and learning tool increased in the 1990s, as publishers began to produce high quality translated screenplays, which provided both English and Japanese versions of movie dialogue, side-by-side (see Matsuzawa, 2007).

With the advent of DVDs, the language-learning potential of movies jumped exponentially. Here in Japan, most movie DVDs come with multiple language options, allowing students to listen to the film and access subtitles in English and Japanese, or even one of several other languages. As DVD technology has improved, the price has also fallen, so that both DVDs themselves and DVD players are easily affordable. Most personal computers come with DVD playing capabilities, providing the majority of college students with access to the required technology.

Learning English from movies can be simultaneously enjoyable, informative and convenient. Watching movies provides learners with an opportunity to see examples of social situations and cultural contexts where language is actually used for communication (Chase, 2006; Fukunaga, 1998; Gardner & Garcia, 1996; Keene, 2006). Movies provide students with an opportunity to practice their language skills, learn about foreign cultures, and come away from these experiences with the confidence that they can continue to master this new language on their own.

EFL teachers here in Japan have been using movies to teach students for decades (Kikuchi, 1997). The challenge presented by English language

movies is to decide how to incorporate their study in the classroom, and how to make the language more comprehensible. To provide a word-for-word translation of an entire movie would be a daunting task. Published screenplay texts with Japanese translations and explanations of grammar and vocabulary offer a potentially powerful resource. The challenge is to find ways of using the translations that will assist, rather than interfere, with students' English skills practice.

The key, in my experience, is to make sure that students are put into situations where they need to attend to the second language, without being able to depend on their native tongue. Asking students to study the Japanese translations on their own, as homework, allows us to focus on English directly, when together in class. This approach would appear to be congruent with Krashen's ideas about comprehension and input (Krashen, 2004), as they relate to second language education.

"The Comprehension Hypothesis helps us with the issue of whether and how to use the student's first language in foreign language education. The [hypothesis] predicts that the first language helps when it is used to make input more comprehensible: This happens when we use the first language to provide background information. This could be in the form of short readings or explanations by the teacher before a complex topic is presented... [On the other hand] first language use can hurt when it is used in ways that do not encourage comprehensible input. This happens when we translate and students have no need to attend to the second language input." (Krashen, 2004, p. 7).

For teachers who wish to provide an "English only" environment in their classrooms, screenplay translations can serve as an invaluable

resource. The detailed vocabulary and cultural explanations provide essential background information, greatly assisting student comprehension. By relying on these screenplays, my students and I were able to bypass the time-consuming task of trying to translate everything as we went along. This freed up more time for students to practice and use English in the classroom. Without the assistance of the screenplay translations as support material, the challenge of trying to practice and understand the language of an entire movie, during one semester, would be extremely difficult.

Finally, a key goal of this movie study approach was to help students develop confidence about their ability to improve their English skills. Researchers who have studied motivational patterns associated with successful learning have theorized that it is important for learners to experience success frequently, as they engage challenges that are not too far above their abilities (Bandura, 1986; Csikszentimihalyi, 1990). This motivates learners to put in the effort needed to develop their skills, over time. Improvement of skills leads to continued success and greater confidence, leading gradually to higher levels of skill, and eventually mastery (Chase, 2000; Ford, 1992). This is why providing students with opportunities to enjoy their study and acquire independent learning strategies is so important. The hope is that such experiences will teach students how to practice and improve their English on their own, far into the future. As Doc is quoted as saying, in *Back to the Future* (Gale, 1989, p.18), "If you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything."

"I think I could gain confidence in my ability to improve my English with movie DVDs and screenplays. When I studied DVDs or screenplays very hard, I can feel that my English got better, but when I didn't study, I don't think that my English got better."

Anyway, I think studying movie DVDs and screenplay is really good way, because I can learn unknown words or phrases... and I can enjoy!"

"This way of studying English is good because it's easy to try and to continue after graduation. What I have studied through this class is alive English like conversation. I have few chances to talk with foreigners... so this activity is very useful for me. Now I make it rule to watch DVD with both Japanese and English subtitles. Studying English with entertainment brings us great motivation."

"I think movie DVDs and screenplays help me improve my English skills. I got a lot of phrases and words from them which I haven't known before. Conversations in them are daily English, so they are very helpful for us. And I can also enjoy learning English by seeing interesting movies."

"I have gained confidence in my ability to improve my English with movie DVDs. I think Stuart Little 2 was good for me to learn and understand English, but Independence Day is a little too difficult. I think using movie DVDs and screenplays is the good way to learn English on my own. We can watch DVDs again and again until we can understand. I can enjoy this way of learning English, so I think I can improve my skills."

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