"Movies and ELT: Some Techniques for Classroom."

Abstract:

This paper will discuss some considerations for selecting movie sequences for classroom activities. It will also present different activities for using movies in classroom contexts, as well as suggestions for movies and sequences with which to use them. The paper will include some techniques for addressing different aspects of language learning such as vocabulary acquisition as well as developing cross cultural awareness. Some of the activities included here are developed by the author and are described on the basis of his personal classroom experience of trying them out in the actual settings, while others have been adapted or directly borrowed from literature on the subject. The learners on whom the activities were tried were college students and their average age was between 17 and 22 years.

As I share my personal experience with these activities, it is hoped that the discussion will be beneficial for the purposes of replication and classroom methodology. Indian films are very well-knit in the daily existence of Indian learners and if they can be utilized for the purpose of learning English, it will be beneficial for the learners. There is a promising future for the development of new activities, growth in research and uses of movies in ELT in Gujarat and for that rest of the India.

Introduction:

"Film...is best used as a spice, to be fitted into the syllabus where it is effective. To change the metaphor, films-and the VCR itself are but teaching/learning instruments...They do not represent a teaching method' nor can they replace the skills of the teacher. But they can add greatly to the teacher's repertoire of techniques, and to students' enthusiasm and pleasure". (Bad dock, 1996, p. 6) It is necessary that foreign language teachers have to adopt some new techniques in the classroom teaching to keep students' interest and enthusiasm towards learning alive. One of the techniques could be using movies scenes and sequences to teach a language. I frequently use movie clips from different movies in my teaching to make the teaching more interesting and more meaningful.

Some Considerations for Selection

A common practice by teachers who use films in their classes is to simply use a film that they like. There is actually nothing wrong with doing this, as long as the accompanying activities and tasks are appropriate. However, forcing a particular clip upon students just because the teacher finds it interesting or funny is not advisable. This often results in teacher realizing that her students did not appreciate the film nearly as much, if at all, as the teacher had anticipated, and the activity results in a flop. Some teachers like to select the activity or task and then search for a film that fits their needs. This can be a long, tiring process because it

requires either an almost photographic memory of every film ever seen by a particular teacher, or it requires the viewing of entire films in quest of that perfect' clip. Other teachers follow a different approach; they decide what activity or task might be suitable as they are watching a film. Sometimes we notice certain features in a film and say, "Oh that would be great for this activity." This makes a teacher watch movies with a whole new perspective and takes a little of the traditional entertainment value out of viewing movies, but that is just another one of the numerous sacrifices teachers must make for the better learning of their students. By using this approach a teacher eventually accumulates a collection of suitable clips and activities which reduces the searching process somewhat; however, teachers who like to use film never stop watching movies from this teacher perspective.

Before any activity with film is selected, or before any particular film or clip is chosen, teachers must consider the particular group of students it is to be used with. Even the best activity can fail miserably if the wrong movie is used. For example, age is important when thinking about a clip that will be motivating or even interesting to students. If a particular group consists of middle-aged learners, then a clip that includes typical .behavior of today's high school students would likely be inappropriate and uninteresting to them. Likewise, if the class is a group of children, a sequence involving parents discussing marital problems would be just as uninteresting and potentially more inappropriate. Similar consideration for students' socio-cultural background should be given when using film which contains cultural information that is potentially inappropriate in the classroom.

(An important note is that all of the films used in the activities included in this paper are owned legally by me. Legal experts have assured me that their use for educational purposes such as those portrayed in this paper falls within the legal limits of local copyright laws. This paper is not intended to promote the sale or copy of any of the material cited herein. However, teachers who wish to include this type of activity in their classroom have the responsibility of doing so within the legal allowances of copyright law in their area).

To aid the process of deciding what material is the best and how to use it in the classroom, Allan (1991) offers a suggested "plan for selecting non-ELT video" such as a film, television program, or documentary:

1. View the material before you teach it.

2. View it without sound the first time through. (If it's too long to do this right through, view the first few minutes without sound.)

3. Note your thoughts about what you've seen. (Who are the characters? What is the setting? What is the programme about?)

4. View it again without sound.

5. If you think you might use the programme, try to list your reasons: What will you use it for and with which students? What part of your syllabus could it link into? Are there any other materials you could use with it? Why will your students like it? What do you expect them to understand from it?

6. Note the ideas about how you will use it: What techniques might work? How much time will it need? What preparatory work is needed? (pp. 23-24)

Some might question the step which includes viewing the film with no sound. This may be due to the inherent need for a film viewer to hear the soundtrack of a film while viewing. However, in my experience with this process, I have found that the lack of sound encourages more concentration on the visual detail of a film. It is this detail that can be overlooked with the distraction of sound, and I feel it is one of the more important aspects of using film in ELT. These ideas can also be applied to the selection of films or more specifically, clips (e.g. a three-to-five-minute clip) from films. I will now describe two activities, based on short movie clips.

Activity I - "Vocabulary Watch"

This activity is designed to build and reinforce vocabulary. The students should be instructed to have a blank piece of paper and something to write with. The teacher should explain that they are going to watch a sequence of approximately three minutes movie with a lot of visual detail. Their task is to write down every object in English that they see on the screen (e.g., car, tree, birds) as fast as they can because the movie will not stop. This activity can be adjusted to fit other possible lesson objectives or topics by asking students to make lists of the actions (verbs) they see occurring, or adjectives, or adverbs.

Procedure:

1. Tell the students what is going to happen and what they have to do.

2. Play the sequence. My preference is with sound, as I find that the sound track enhances student interest in participating in the activity.

3. Students watch the sequence and write down all of the vocabulary items they can in English while it is playing.

4. The teacher asks for some examples from the class and asks students to count their words. This would be an option for teachers who might want to use this activity as a vocabulary game

5. Play the sequence again while students write down any vocabulary items they may have missed the first time due to time constraints. It has been my experience that the second round usually results in many more words listed per student.

6. In pairs or groups of three, students compare their lists. Again, this is an option for a vocabulary game, as well as being a way for students to acquire new vocabulary that they had not written on their own lists.

Duration: 15-20 minutes.

This activity allows for students to reinforce vocabulary they already know, but at the same time they can learn new words when comparing their lists with their classmates'. It is most likely that some students will write more words than others. Hence those who write less will benefit from those who write more. A common post-activity would be to ask the students to use the words or some of the new words from their lists in sentences to reinforce their meaning. Another idea is to have them check their words for spelling in a dictionary.

Films for this Activity

Virtually any film sequence with a lot of visual detail will work with this activity.Some of my personal favorites include: *Chak De India*, *Taare Zameen Par*, and *Spider Man-I*. I. I use it either the opening scene or one very near the beginning.

The opening scene of the film '*Taare Zameen* Par' begins with a boy (Issan) who comes back from school to home. During his journey from school to home, he sees many other incidents, traffic, different buildings, other people walking on the road and example of various means of transportation.

At the beginning of the *Chak De India* there is a scene that begins with an Indian sports team travelling from India to Australia to play women's hockey world championship. The scene ends when the team reaches to hotel. Vocabulary that can be seen in this sequence includes a large variety of elements. The scenes here are full of vivid colors and visual detail, which help students distinguish the many different items they can write down.

All these movies are well known in India and include world famous actors that most students will recognize immediately. Students seem to be motivated by the fact that they recognize and usually like the movies and the actors. It is not uncommon for them to ask to see a bit more of these movies after the activity. These are not the only movies recommended for this activity, but ones that have proven to be quite effective. Students in my classes (beginning to advanced levels) have been observed to accumulate as many as 30 to 35 words during the first viewing. The second round of viewing and consequent comparison stages usually result in increases in word counts; however, the number varies widely from student to student.

Variations of the Activity- This activity can be altered to address the acquisition and/or reinforcement of specific vocabulary. For example, if a teacher would like to present vocabulary based on transportation or travel, a movie that includes a scene at an airport might be suitable. In many movies, airport scenes usually include someone arriving by taxi, bus, or private car. They then proceed to walk through the airport terminal where a number of vocabulary items related to the task at hand are visible, until them finally arrive at their departure gate and go on board the plane. The teacher will instruct the students to write only those items related to travel or transportation. Here again teachers have the option to cater to the activity to their lesson plans by asking students to write other kinds of words besides nouns (adverbs, adjectives, verbs). Another variation that works especially well for beginning students is to have them write all of the vocabulary items they can in English, and the items they do not know in English can be written in their native language. The teacher then instructs them to take their lists home and find the most suitable English equivalents of those words in a dictionary. The end result is basically the same-they learn new vocabulary. An activity similar to "Vocabulary Watch" is one called "Stills," found in Stempleski and Toma in (1990, p.107). The main difference between their activity and "Vocabulary Watch" is that theirs does not

require students to write as they watch the moving picture; instead the teacher pauses the movie at the appropriate frame and presents the vocabulary while it is frozen on the screen. Students can be asked to write vocabulary that they see as well, but teachers commonly use the frozen frame to illustrate vocabulary that is relevant to the lesson plan or course book theme being studied at a given time.

Activity 2 "Narration"

This activity is designed for intermediate learners and above to develop fluency skills. It consists of students working in pairs, with one of them simultaneously narrating to the other what they see happening in a film sequence. It is an activity that creates a lot of energy and noise in the classroom. This seems to encourage students to talk a little more and they have to speak louder and louder. The noise serves as camouflage for students who may feel insecure about their speaking ability. They can speak more freely knowing that classmates or the teacher might not notice their errors. The teacher basically does nothing more than roam around the room monitoring, making sure that students are actually speaking in English. There should be no co-section by the teacher during the activity. To begin, the teacher asks the students to sit in pairs, with the A's facing the TV screen and the B's sinning with their backs to the screen. The teacher then explains that those facing the screen (the A's) are going to see a short movie clip, and their task is to simultaneously narrate the story to the _B's while the clip is being shown. The students who are not facing the screen (the B's) have to listen carefully to their partners and try to listen to the soundtrack from the movie at the same time, which is quite difficult due to the noise from other pairs. There is no need for a pre-activity for this activity to achieve its objective which is primarily to develop fluency and communication skills such as speaking and listening. However, if the story line coincides with a particular theme in the class, then students might be asked to discuss as a whole class or in small groups a related topic to prepare them for what they are about to see (i.e., if the scene is about a restaurant mishap, they might discuss any unpleasant personal experiences they may have had in restaurants. The same type of activity could also be used as a post-activity.

Procedure:

1. Tell the students what is going to happen, what they have to do and set up the A and B students.

2. Arrange the proper seating of the B students (facing away from the screen)

3. Play the sequence.

4. Students facing the screen (the A's) begin to narrate the story on the screen to their partner as they are watching it. Their partners just listen.

5. Stop the movie sequence and ask for examples of events from the clip that the listeners understood from their partner's narration.

6. Play the clip again for everyone to see and allow the listeners to check the accuracy of their partner's narration.

Duration: 10-15 minutes.

Another possibility for a post-activity could be to have all the students write down the sequence of events in their own words or they could write down their own personal experiences similar to the events from the clip. This activity also develops listening comprehension skills, since the silent partner has to listen attentively and then check whether their partner's narration of the story is accurate or not. Often students will detect discrepancies between their partner's descriptions and what they eventually see on the screen the second time the clip is played. Also worth noting during this activity is the community-learning phenomenon. Since all of the pairs are describing the same things at more or less the same time, it is common to see how students borrow words and phrases from the pairs sitting close to them during the narration. A person may get stuck on a particular word, and then hear a neighbor say the word they are looking for.

There are no prohibitions in this activity against using the same words as other pairs, only that their native language cannot be used.

Films for this Activity:-

'A very strong recommendation for the films used during this activity is to include scenes with lots of visual reference with little or no dialogue. If students have to concentrate on the dialogue in order to describe what is happening, the activity will most likely fail. Completing the task with a clip with too much dialogue could be compared to simultaneously interpreting from one language to another in that the student must listen, understand, and relay the information to their partner at the same time. This is something that even the most skilled bi-lingual or multi-lingual person would have difficulty accomplishing, let alone a student who is in the process of learning a second language. It is therefore suggested to select a scene with lots of physical comedy. I have observed that students rather talk much about and listen to something humorous than something romantic or terrifying. No one seems to want to hear about "Brad Pitt's penetrating blue eyes gazing into the seemingly confused, tear-filled eyes of Julia Roberts A When the scene shows something funny, everyone has a good time, and it is often much easier for the narrators to include their own forms of non-verbal communication to get the message across, and something that makes someone laugh is usually easier to remember. The films I often select for this activity are Mr. 'BEAN, Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy or other comedy films of Govinda, Particularly directed by David Dhawan. The first three actually contain several scenes that could be used for this activity. All the scenes are comical and provide ample visual detail to make the narration easier for students.

The clip from The Amazing Adventure of Mr. Bean:-

It begins when Mr. Bean comes in a car and parks it. The scene is about an examination hall, ends when he comes to know that he chose the wrong question paper.

Another clip from The Return of Mr. Bean begins when he goes to a shopping mall and buys different things from the mall. It ends with a funny incident of toilet scene. These clips are good barometer to check if the listeners do in fact understand their partners, because at the point when the first person in the movie vomits, everyone in the class usually reacts with disgust and laughter. They raise their shoulders and crouch into their chairs as if to hide inside their clothes. One might think that the students would be

discouraged to continue with a topic such as this, but the opposite is true. They are always interested in seeing the scene when it is played the second time. Loud conversation and laughter dominate the entire activity as a result of the situation and physical comedy. The teacher really does not have to roam around the room during this clip to see if effective communication is taking place. There are numerous other possible film clips that can work for this activity. Most teachers like to use movies they are familiar with because they can find specific scenes more quickly. However, for a teacher who is a cinema fan, this can be a fun and entertaining type of lesson to plan for. Just make sure there are fresh batteries in the remote control!

Variations of the Activity:

A variation of "Narrations" is another activity from Stempleski and Tomalin (1990, p. 120) that is called "Watchers and Listeners." The difference between the two activities is that in the latter, the narrators do not watch the sequence and describe it at the same time. They are instructed to watch the clip and narrate it. The listeners, meanwhile, are instructed to listen to the soundtrack while it is being played and to try to answer questions such as 'How many_ people are in the scene?' or 'Where is the scene taking place?' or 'What is happening?' After the first time the sequence is played, the listeners give their answers to these questions to their partners. Then the watchers give their version of the story. This allows both students to participate more actively and to check each other's ' comprehension and communication a bit more closely, instead of having one of the students sit passively while the other is watching. This would be an advantage over "Narrationsg" however, I feel the spontaneity and faster pace of "Narrations" is an advantage as well. A post-activity could be an information-gap task that promotes authentic communication between learners, such as one that might have the pairs of students interviewing each other about the clothing worn by the characters.

Conclusion

All of these activities—those developed by me and those adapted and borrowed from other sources have proven to be effective in my own ELT experience. However, success with them was not immediate in every case, due mainly to the selection of inappropriate sequences for specific activities; to not giving adequate consideration to the makeup of particular groups of students; and to simply not having prepared adequately beforehand. I learned quickly that my students do not always share my taste in film, and that it is a good idea to take students' tastes into consideration when selecting films for classroom use. In order for these and other activities to work best, teachers must carefully plan and develop the tasks and select the most appropriate film sequence to accomplish the particular objectives of the tasks. The planning process may sometimes take a considerable amount of time, but the results achieved in classroom application and the students' responses make it worth the effort. With the advent of newer technology such as DVD, the dynamics for the use of film in ELT are constantly changing. DVD provides some advantages over standard VHS videos in that the chapter selection, language, and subtitle features can lend themselves to quicker and even more varied uses of films. However, the same features can also be a disadvantage in that not all teachers are familiar with how to use them efficiently in a manner that would not distract the students from the task at hand. Likewise, if teachers wish to use a particular clip from a

film, it could be more time-consuming with DVD because finding the specific scene within a chapter might require a lot of skill and patience with the remote control. VHS players do not normally require on-the spot video searching and can therefore aid teachers in preparing complete video activities before entering the class, and the risk of students being distracted or bored while the teacher fumbles with the remote control is minimized. Another potential obstacle for the use of DVD is that schools are not equipped with DVD players in their classrooms (of course, this may also be the case with VHS players in some instances), nor are there DVD players available. Teachers with the resources can bring their own player and film to class, but there will always be teachers without the appropriate financial means to be able to do this. In both the short- and long-run, it is their students who will suffer if teachers cannot find a way to incorporate either a VHS or DVD into their teaching environment.The most common reaction from students is that they are much more interested in their classes when a film component is included.

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        -*Chak De India*
        -*Spider Man I, ill I*
        -*WelCome*
        -*Mr. Bean*
        -*Laurel and Hardy*

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Dr. K. J. RUGHANI
Assistant Professor,
Smt. H. B. PALAN COLLEGE OF ARTS AND COMMERCE
ANJAR. (Kachchh)