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Using DVD Movie Segments for Lower-level Students

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This article presents effective ways of using DVD movie segments for lower-level students. First, the pros and cons of using movies in English classes are discussed. Then, examples of how to construct questions that do not focus so much on listening as on content are given. Finally, content-based exercises are introduced.

本稿は初級レベル英語学習者に対する映画DVDの効果的活用法を述べたものである。まず英語授業に

映画を使うことの長所、短所を述べる。次に、リスニングではなく内容に焦点を当てた問題作りのヒントを示し、コンテンツベースのレッスンプランを紹介する。

Why movies?

The interest in using movies for English classes has been growing (Miura, 2003). It is self-evident that movies are a valuable resource for language teaching and learning (Stempleski & Tomalin, 2001). The biggest reason is that movies are motivating, exciting, and fun. In addition, using movies in class can encourage students to watch more movies outside of class, thereby enhancing self-study.

The second reason is that movies are authentic material. They are not graded for second language learners (Underwood, 1989). They provide the natural speed and rhythm of English as well as expressions that native English speakers actually use in daily life.

Another advantage is that movies provide not only audio but also visual cues, which help the students to understand the content more, compared with audio materials such as cassette tapes or CDs.

Furthermore, “seeing a movie not only exposes students to the target language, but also lets them experience a different culture” (Amino, 2003, p.69). Movies are ideal for showing the traditions, customs, values, and manners of different cultures.

Finally, movies can be educational and informative, and are a rich resource for a variety of topics. Hence their use makes it possible to cover a wide variety of themes in class.

Possible problems

Despite the advantages mentioned above, movies are not used as much as students would like. This is because movies are generally considered to be too difficult (Sherman, 2003). The biggest problem is listening. Most students seem to find it almost impossible to understand English movies without subtitles. The conversations are too fast for them, and the sound changes that occur in natural spoken English, such as *gonna* or *cuz* are often unfamiliar.

Vocabulary is difficult, too. Some movies dealing with specialized topics contain difficult technical terms. In addition, there are a lot of slang and colloquialisms that students have probably never learned at school.

When the topic itself is unfamiliar or difficult, it hinders the students' comprehension. It should also be noted that some comedies with culturally based jokes are difficult for non-native speakers to understand and laugh at.

Techniques for using movies for lower-level students

Then, how can we make movies more accessible for lower-level students? Below are some techniques.

Utilizing DVD

Both VHS and DVD “allow for much greater versatility in the way film can be shown.” (Stempleski & Tomalin, 2001, p. 2). Yet DVD has more functions and is more suitable for language classes than VHS because subtitles and language can be changed depending on the students' levels.

Japanese students' reading ability is generally higher than their listening ability. Therefore, showing English subtitles can facilitate their understanding to a certain extent. Showing Japanese subtitles is also not a bad idea. The language input does not always have to be in English. Through Japanese subtitles, the students can understand the content more easily, and can then express in English what they have understood.

Focus on the content, not on listening

If movies are extremely difficult to understand, comprehension exercises should be made with great care. They should not depend as much on the students' listening ability but rather on the visual clues and subtitles of the movie. The focus should be on the content, not on the language itself. By focusing on the content, it will not be necessary for the students to *listen* to the movie itself to understand the segment. If comprehension questions can be made without focusing too exclusively on listening, movies can be used more flexibly regardless of the listening ability of students.

Lesson plan

Below is a content-based lesson plan in which the above techniques are utilized. It is a 90-minute lesson for lower- to intermediate-level students. The topic is Organ Transplants, and DVD chapter five of the movie, John Q is used. This lesson plan consists of six exercises:

- Previewing 1
- Previewing 2 (Vocabulary)
- Comprehension
- Writing and Listening

- Scanning
- Your Opinions

Previewing 1: How much do you know?

This first exercise introduces the topic of the movie and gives background information to the students. In this exercise, the students read some statements regarding organ transplant facts in the U.S. and try to guess the right answers. After the students finish guessing, the teacher goes over each statement and gives the students the correct answers.

Previewing 2: Vocabulary

This simple previewing exercise is designed for understanding the DVD segment and learning necessary vocabulary for the next exercise. The students match the definitions with the expressions that are actually used in the movie.

Comprehension

Below is a summary of the DVD segments that students watch. The teacher shows this passage to the students after they watch the DVD segment with Japanese subtitles. Then the students fill in the blanks with the appropriate expressions that have already been introduced in the previous vocabulary exercise. Since the same vocabulary items are used, the students can have an opportunity to use and reinforce what they have learned.

“My son is very sick. The _____ said that his heart is useless and he needs a healthy heart to live. If he doesn’t have a _____ operation, he’s going to die...”

Writing and listening

This exercise is a combination of composition and dictation. Here, some lines from the DVD segment are written, and each line contains some blanks and their Japanese subtitles. One example is, “Wait a second. _____ are _____ (選択肢はまだあります).” First, the students fill in the blanks guessing from the Japanese subtitles. Then, they watch the DVD segment to confirm their answers. The students can learn useful colloquial expressions as well as how the expressions are put differently in Japanese and English.

Scanning

In this exercise, authentic reading material related to the topic is used. For example, an organ donor card can be used for this topic. First, the students read *true* or *false* questions. Then they scan for the relevant information and answer the questions.

Your opinions

The last exercise is a controlled discussion exercise. Here, students are asked to express their own opinions about a related topic. This exercise gives some information about four patients who are waiting for a heart transplant operation. For example, one patient is a 3-year-old Hispanic girl who has been sick for 2 years, but her parents are unemployed and cannot afford to pay for her operation. Another patient is a 52-year-old Japanese-American cardiologist who has no family and has been waiting for an operation for 10 years. The students have to consider some factors such as each patient’s age, economic situation, nationality, etc., and have to decide who should be given the first priority and explain why they think so.

Conclusion

Movies can be excellent educational material, but they can also be very difficult to use, especially for lower-level students. However, by utilizing DVD and focusing on the content, we can make them more student-friendly and suitable, even for lower-level students.

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