Oops! Motivating EFL students with movie goofs

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Most students tend to believe that when they watch a Hollywood movie they are seeing a perfect, finished product that has gone through countless checks by the producers, the director, the writers, and especially the editors. Wrong! Almost any film contains *goofs*, most commonly in continuity, such as a character's appearance suddenly changing due to a scene being shot at a different time; revealing mistakes, such as an obvious stuntman playing the part of an actor or actress; factual errors or anachronisms, such as a prop being used that wasn't available or invented in the time the film is depicting; or even the audio and visual being unsynchronized. This paper will show how these movie goofs can be used in the EFL classroom either as a warm-up or closing activity, or as a group project, and how such activities increase student motivation.

学生がハリウッド映画を見るとき、製作者や監督、特に編集者による点検を繰り返し完璧に仕上がった作品を見ているのだと思っている者がほとんどである。しかしそれは間違いと言える。どんな映画でもちょっとした「どじ」のような間違いはある。例えば最もよくあるのは、登場人物の外見が突然変わっているといったような連続性の間違いで、これは一つのシーンを別々の時に撮影するせいで起こる。他には、明らかにスタントマンが演じていることがわかるような見え透いた間違い、その映画の舞台が設定されている時代には未だ手に入らないものや発明されていない小道具を使うような、事実の誤りや時代錯誤、ひどいときには音響と映像が合っていないような間違いもある。本論では、これらの映画の間違いがEFL（外国語としての英語）授業においてウォーミングアップや授業最後の活動、グループ作業として有効であること、またそれがいかに学生のモチベーションを上げているかを示していく。

A key component in the motivation level of Japanese EFL students is interest (see Dornyei, 1990), and studies have shown that students are intrinsically motivated to watch movies (see Marcikiewicz, 2000; Stempleski, Tomalin, & Maley, 2001; Harmer, 2001; Lonergan, 1989, Byrne, 1990), making them one of the best resources for EFL instruction in Japan. This paper will show how movie goofs can be used in the EFL classroom to provide enjoyable activities that motivate students to speak English.

Most students tend to think that when they watch a popular Hollywood movie they are seeing a perfect, finished product that has gone through countless checks by the producers, the director, the writers, and especially the editors. Wrong! Almost any film contains numerous goofs, most commonly in continuity, such as a character's appearance suddenly changing due to a scene being shot at a different time; revealing mistakes, such an obvious stuntman playing the part of an actor or actress; factual errors or anachronisms, such as prop being used that wasn't available or invented in the time the film is depicting; or even the audio and visual being unsynchronized. Such goofs provide a rich resource for motivating students to speak in the classroom. The following examples are taken from the film *Back to the Future* (Zemeckis, 1985).

Exploiting movie goofs in *Back to the Future*

Although somewhat dated, *Back to the Future* remains an extremely popular film in Japan. It tells the story of Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) who accidentally finds himself in his hometown in 1955, having traveled in a time machine invented by his friend and eccentric scientist Doc (Christopher Lloyd) from the year 1985. Because Marty has interacted with his future mother, Lorraine, and father, George (Lea Thompson and Crispin Glover), he changes the course of history and risks never existing unless he gets them to meet and fall in love. More importantly, it is a film that is fun to watch. But like all films, it contains a treasure trove of movie goofs that can be easily exploited in the EFL classroom. Consider the following examples:

Scene 2: "Damn, I'm late for school!"

Realizing that he is late for school, Marty hitches a ride on the back of a car while riding his skateboard. As he is being pulled by the car through town, he waves to the girls he sees exercising in the fitness center. As he waves, we see that Marty is wearing a watch on his left wrist (00:06:27). However, when he meets his girlfriend Jennifer (Claudia Wells) at school moments later, he's not wearing a watch (00:07:10).

Scene 5: "The car, Dad!"

When Marty returns home he finds that the family car has been wrecked by Biff (Thomas F. Wilson), who refuses to accept responsibility for the accident. As Marty is listening to Biff argue with his father, we see a jar full of candy (00:12:32). However, moments later, when Biff decides to have some candy, the jar is suddenly half full (00:13:19)!

Scene 11: "Re-elect Mayor Red Thomas!"

In one of the more glaring mistakes in the film, Marty has just entered Hill Valley in 1955. As he is looking around the town, a campaign car passes by. On top of the car is a sign that is facing forward, and two loud speakers (00:36:50). But when the same car passes Marty again, the sign is facing sideways and the rear loud speaker is missing (00:36:59)!

Scene 22: "My name is Darth Vader!"

In a scene very popular with students, Marty, dressed as a space alien, awakens George in order to scare him into

asking Lorraine out on a date. When we first see Marty in this outfit, he has a hair dryer tucked under his belt (01:02:20). A mere seconds later, we see *Darth* again, only this time the hairdryer has mysteriously disappeared (01:02:27), only to return again moments later!

Scene 27: "Look. You're not gonna be pickin' a fight, Dad. Da-da-da-daddy-o"

In this scene, we find Marty talking to George (who is hanging laundry on the clothesline outside) about their plan to have George *rescue* Lorraine. Before George starts to hang the clothes, we see that both of Marty's shirt pockets are closed (01:12:45). However, in the very next scene, his left shirt pocket is folded inside (01:12:58). And when the camera angle changes again seconds later, Marty's shirt pocket is closed again (01:13:07)!

More examples

Most of these goofs are due to the fact that a scene is often shot and re-shot many times, often at different times of the day or even on a different day, so something is apt to change in the appearance of the scene. Other goofs, however, are not so easily noticed.

For example, in Scene 8, when Marty first arrives at the mall parking lot and greets Einstein, Doc's dog, his skateboard wheels are yellow (00:18:25). But when the back of Doc's truck begins to open revealing the DeLorean time machine, Marty's skateboard wheels suddenly turn pink (00:18:34)! And in Scene 12, when Marty first enters Lou's Diner in 1955 to use the phone, he finds Doc's name,

address, and phone number on the left page of the phone book (00:37:49). However, after he hangs up the phone, he rips out the right page (00:38:07). And in Scene 25, when Marty first starts riding a makeshift skateboard from a scooter he *borrows* from a kid, it has old-fashioned steel wheels (01:06:13). But when he is being pushed by Biff's car moments later, his skateboard has modern wheels and trucks (01:06:49).

Another common mistake found in many films has to do with lighting. For example, in Scene 12 we find Marty sitting next to George at the counter in Lou's Diner. Outside, we can see Biff's car parked in bright sunlight (00:38:40). But when Biff and his friends enter the diner and start hassling George, the car is suddenly in the shade (00:38:50). And in Scene 25, when Marty runs into a woman on his skateboard, they are both sent tumbling down onto the sidewalk, which is in bright sunlight (01:07:00). However, in the very next scene, the sidewalk is in shade (01:07:02).

Other mistakes are even more difficult to catch, such as in Scene 1 when Marty is thrown into the bookshelf after Doc's amplifier explodes. When the bookshelf first falls on him, Marty's left leg is bent at the knee (00:04:19). In the very next scene, both of his legs are sticking out straight (00:04:21). And even trickier to spot, the camera crew and equipment is reflected briefly in Marty's sunglasses (00:04:33). Anachronisms and factual errors are virtually impossible to catch, and therefore they should not be used as language prompts. However, they can still be pointed out to students for general information and cultural awareness. For example, the episode of the *Honeymooners* (1955) that Lorraine's family is watching in November, 1955, wasn't

aired until December 31st (00:46:08). Or the Gibson ES-345 that Marty plays at the school dance in 1955 was not produced until after 1958 (01:27:17).

Audio mistakes are also nearly impossible for students to catch, but they enjoy trying to hear the goof after the teacher explains what to listen for. For example, in the *save the clock tower* scene, the can for donations makes the sound of a few noisy coins inside (00:10:29), but when Marty donates a quarter, we hear the sound of only one coin dropping into an empty can (00:10:48). And at the end of Marty's *Johnny B. Goode* guitar solo, the drums can still be heard, but a shot of the drummer shows that he is not playing the drums (01:29:18).

Some of these errors can be particularly revealing from a socio-cultural perspective. Take for instance the scene in which the Libyan terrorists shoot Doc and chase Marty in the DeLorean. First of all, the Libyan driver is actually wearing a Saudi headdress, and the so-called Libyan terrorist is not speaking the Libyan dialect of Arabic, or indeed any dialect of Arabic at all. What he is speaking is an exaggerated, stereotypical series of guttural noises that bear no resemblance to anything spoken in Libya (00:29:36).

Teaching options

There are several ways in which these movie goofs can be utilized in the EFL classroom. For example, they can be used as a warm-up or closing exercise in a film-based class. The instructor can ask students for answers individually or put students in pairs, groups, or teams and award points for each correct answer. In addition, the instructor can assign individual or group projects in which students present movie goofs to the class from a selected film. No matter how the instructor chooses to use these goofs, one thing will become very clear: Students *enjoy* these exercises. And while it may be difficult at first to catch all or even some of the mistakes, with repeated practice the students become much more critical viewers and listeners, which only enhances their film-based language learning.

Resources

One of the best resources for finding these goofs is the *Internet Movie Database* <http://www.imdb.com/>. For almost every movie posted on this website, one can find a link to goofs under the heading *Fun Stuff*. Other websites containing movie goofs are *Whoops! Movie Goofs* <http://www.jonhs.com/moviegoofs/>, and *Movie Mistakes. Open Your Eyes* < http://www.moviemistakes.com/>. There is even an entire website devoted to movie goofs found in the film *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997) called the *Unofficial Raise the Titanic! Movie-Goofs Page* <http://www.raisethetitanic.com/movie/goofs.html>. But perhaps what makes this such a worthwhile language activity for students is the emphasis on fun. That is, not only do movies offer an enjoyable means of EFL instruction not found in any EFL textbook, even their mistakes and flaws can be usefully and enjoyably exploited!

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