Transforming Foreign Language Classes With Movies

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Many teachers and commentators are quick to point out the potential pitfalls of using movies in the foreign language classroom. This paper therefore begins with a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of using movies as teaching materials. It continues with suggestions for circumventing the disadvantages and reaping the benefits of films by using short sequences. It describes how to select useful movie sequences, obtain scripts from online resources, and prepare them for classroom use. A sequence from the movie *Jack and Sarah* is used to provide some guidelines for creating viewing exercises. Some basic procedures for teaching a sequence from the movie *Gregory's Girl* are also included. This is followed by advice on designing additional active viewing tasks and some ideas about how to use movies as springboards for discussion and projects.

多くの教師や研究者は外国語教育に映画を利用することの潜在的問題を指摘するであろう。従って本論文では、始めに教材として映画を用いることの利点と欠点について論じた後、映画の一場面を抜き出して用いることによりデメリットを回避し、メリットを享受する方法を提案する。ここでは、有用な題材の選択、ネット上からの脚本入手、そしてそれらを授業に用いるための準備についても説明する。また、具体例として、映画『赤ちゃんにバンザイ?!』の一場面を用いた場合の生徒に課す課題を設定するガイドラインと共に、映画『グレゴリーズ・ガール』の一場面を用いて指導する際の基本的手法を示す。最後に、能動的課題設定に関するアドバイスと、映画をディスカッションやプロジェクトに発展させる方法について述べる。

Dimitar Berbatov, the former Bulgarian international and Manchester United football star, learned to speak English by watching the American *Godfather* series of films (Burt, 2006). Yet movies should not just be for independent study. They can also be useful as teaching materials. Recent advances in media technology and growth in online resources have made it easier than ever before for teachers to access and show movies in the classroom. Through online digital media streaming services, either free of charge such as YouTube or prescription-based such as Netflix (https://www.netflix.com/), Hulu (https://www.hulu.com/), and Amazon Prime Video (https://www.amazon.com/Prime-Video/b?ie=UTF8&node=267688201), it is now possible to stream and project movies in the classroom from a PC, a tablet, or even a mobile phone.

The aim of this paper is first to compare the advantages and disadvantages of using movies in the classroom and then to suggest basic guidelines for preparing short movie sequences for incorporation into regular textbook-based language lessons. These include how to identify and locate suitable sequences as well as prepare movie scripts and listening (or viewing) exercises. Finally, procedures for using these materials in class along with follow-up activities for stimulating communication will be described.

Why Use Movies to Teach English

Advantages

Movies can be powerful teaching materials because they are "engaging and motivating," providing "contextually embedded models of spoken interaction" for L2 communication skills development (Ashcroft, 2015, p. 596). Similarly, Dörnyei (1994) recommended showing films in class as an effective way of motivating L2 learners because it introduces a sociocultural component. This view is echoed by Gilmore (2010), who quoted some typical feedback from a Japanese university student: "Movies are really useful, interesting, and easy-to-learn tools . . . . In fact, I learned some expressions or words from them, for the English in movies are exactly natural speaking English" (p. 119). Although the naturalness of discourse encountered in movies may be debated, there is no doubt that conversations in movies usually contain features of spontaneous, unplanned interactions such as hesitations, false starts, vagueness, and reformulations (Gilmore, 2010). These features are often absent in scripted textbook dialogs.

Understanding English language movies is also a common goal for learners of English. When 567 Taiwanese students were surveyed about the factors involved in the motivation and orientation to study English, Chen, Warden, and Chang (2005) found that the desire to understand movies, books, or magazines ranked as the fourth highest factor following passing job exams, changing jobs more easily, and passing entrance exams. Finally, films can undoubtedly provide excellent opportunities for listening practise and springboards for personalization and discussion.

Disadvantages

There are, however, some drawbacks to using movies as learning materials in the EFL classroom. First, the language used in movies is authentic in terms of its purpose, which is to entertain native or highly proficient speakers. This means that although movies are usually scripted, they share some potentially negative features of unscripted authentic materials, which can "cause problems for learners, such as fatigue, difficulties with idiomatic language, and difficulties with connected speech . . . . These difficulties may be compounded by texts that are filled with difficult vocabulary, grammar, and content" (Ducker & Saunders, 2014, pp. 383-384). Of these difficulties, vocabulary probably represents the most significant barrier to comprehension. Gilmore (2010) warned, "Learners need to know between 3,000 and 6,000 word families to achieve 95 to 98 per cent understanding of films" (p. 114). He therefore concluded that the language contained in movies might not be suitable input for less experienced learners and is likely to lead to listening comprehension failure and negative language learning experiences that may cause a decline in motivation. Lastly, Ashcroft (2015) suggested that another possible pitfall in using movies is that "students remain passive throughout and are denied the opportunity to practice and internalise input from the movies they watch" (p. 596).

Using Short Sequences to Circumvent the Disadvantages and Reap the Benefits

One way to avoid having learners watch a whole movie in class is to identify and use short movie sequences that are both comprehensible to lower level learners as well as relevant to the learners' needs and the language learning syllabus. The main issue is how to locate useful short movie sequences to match and supplement the content of a language course or coursebook.

When using a single sequence of a film to teach a particular language function, any movie genre may be suitable although my personal preference is for comedies. I have also found that lesser known movies are preferable. If students have seen the movie before, it can decrease viewing motivation and interfere with lesson procedures, particularly prediction in the previewing stages.

One could begin by searching online resources such as BusyTeacher (http://busyteacher.org/classroom_activities-listening/movie-worksheets/), where teachers have shared their recommended sequences and provided downloadable task sheets. Sequences are listed by target function or grammar point and by learner level of proficiency.

In addition, the blog, Movie Segments to Assess Grammar Goals (http://moviesegmentstoassessgrammargoals.blogspot.jp/), is an excellent, searchable, and grammar-indexed source of teaching materials that hosts both YouTube links to the movie sequences and accompanying viewing exercises.

These resources are valuable, but my own preference is to make note of appropriate sequences while I watch films for pleasure. For example, in *The Bridges of Madison County* (Eastwood & Kennedy, 1995), there is a sequence in which street directions are given for one of the famous covered bridges. To accompany this sequence, I created a map with a route-tracing listening task (Figure 1).

Alternatively, one can use the Google search function to find the kind of movie sequence required. For example, the search words "hotel check-in scenes in movies" yield plenty of potentially useful sequences such as one from *The Hangover* (Goldberg & Phillips, 2009). At the time of writing, this appeared complete with a link to a 2-minute sequence on YouTube featuring the four stars checking into a hotel in Las Vegas.

With suitable short sequences in hand, it is usually quite simple to create viewing or listening activities that mirror the style of listening or video comprehension tasks found in ELT textbooks, but that are far more compelling and motivating. Following are some ways to do this.

Using Online Resources for Transforming Foreign Language Classes With Movies

Obtaining Scripts

Movie scripts can be invaluable for supporting listening comprehension. Learners can use them for both silent reading and for read-aloud activities. In addition, they can be used to prepare viewing tasks for handouts and for reference purposes. Although movie scripts are occasionally published as books, in most cases teachers will need to conduct online searches to find and download them. There are numerous websites that host movie scripts, but I recommend the following three because of the quantity of scripts available:

Listen to the conversation between Robert and Francesca.

1. Mark the route that Robert has to take.
2. Match the following places with places on the map by writing letters in the spaces.

___ The bridge
___ The old school house
___ Peterson's
___ Cutters

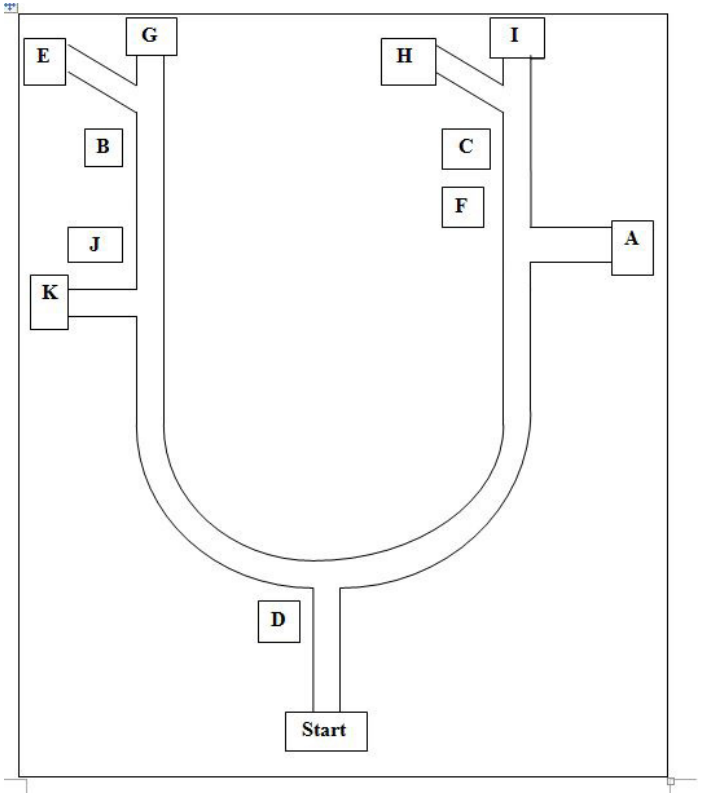

Figure 1. Viewing exercise for *The Bridges of Madison County* (Eastwood & Kennedy, 1995, 00.17.16).

- Springfield (http://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/movie_scripts.php),
- DivX Subtitles Net (http://www.divxsubtitles.net/index.php), and
- Subtitles Net (https://www.sub-titles.net/).

Of the three, Springfield is best because the vast majority of the scripts do not need to be cleaned up, but otherwise the script that is downloaded will probably be a SubRip text. See Appendix A for suggestions about turning a SubRip text into a usable script.

Examples of Movie Viewing Exercises and Task Sheets

Because learner listening performance can be improved by preteaching potentially unknown words that appear in the dialog, it may be advisable to create a word list for previewing study. An example list with Japanese translations is in Appendix B.

One recommended sequence from *Jack and Sarah* (Cross, Day, Sullivan, & Channing-Williams, 1995) takes place in a restaurant and can be incorporated into lessons introducing interactions in restaurants. It begins with the waitress approaching the table where Jack, whose wife died during childbirth, sits with his baby. See Appendix C for a script of the sequence. The following procedure is recommended:

1. Play the first few seconds of the sequence without sound.
2. Pause the sequence and elicit the question *What does he order?*
3. Play Part 1 with sound and elicit answers.
4. Distribute the task sheet (Figure 2) and play the sequence again.
5. Check answers and show the sequence again if necessary.

Situation: In a restaurant (00.40.16-00.43.53).

Circle the correct answer.

Part 1

1. The baby is **13 / 14 / 15** weeks old.
2. The baby is a **boy / girl.**
3. The waitress said: "**Would you like / Do you want** me to heat it up?
4. The man made the baby food himself. **yes / no**

Figure 2. Viewing exercises for a sequence from *Jack and Sarah* (Part 1).

These are multiple choice questions and the answers are included in a string of distracters, all in bold type. The task is to circle the answer to best complete the sentence. Some teachers prefer open questions, but my preference is for items that can be answered without requiring learners to write while viewing, thereby reducing the burden on learner memory and attentional capacity.

Numbers lend themselves well to this kind of comprehension testing format, as in Figure 2, Question 1. For focus on functional phrases, strategies with similar meanings are useful distracters as Figure 2, question 3. These functional phrases can be very important for both reinforcing language covered in coursebooks and for justifying decisions to use sequences from movies.

Synonyms for the correct answer also work well as distracters, as in Figure 3, Part 5. Similarly, words from the same lexical set as the answer make good distracters as in Figure 3, Part 4. In order to train learners to distinguish similar sounds, it is useful to include some minimal pair type items. Names are good for these, as in Figure 3, Part 3, Question 2. The remainder of the answer-circling items are *true* or *false* type statements with *yes* and *no* choices preferred for simplicity.

The following alternative task types are also useful. The first is called Who said it? (see Figure 4, Part 7), or "dialog matching" (Stempelski & Tomalin, 1990, p. 54). This task is especially suitable for sequences with multiple speakers; learners write the first letter of the name of the character who speaks each line next to the line from the dialog. A simplified version of the same task is for students to check the lines spoken by just one character in a list including lines spoken by other characters.

Another task type is to take a series of lines from a dialog, place them in a vertical string as in Who said it? but to change the order. The task for the learner is to number the lines in the order they hear them. This is especially effective for monologs in movies. A third task type involves matching parts of text placed in two adjacent columns. For example, the task could be to match names of characters on the left side column with statements about them on the right. Alternatively, lines of the dialog can be matched with responses to them in the same manner.

Task items about what is seen rather than heard in the sequence can also be valuable, particularly if they focus on an important part of the content. An example is in Figure 3, Part 2: *The customer touched her **once / twice / three times.*** Some longer stretches of discourse in movies can be difficult to create tasks for. However, to assist learners with global understanding, the task can be to circle which topics were mentioned from a list containing distracters.

Part 2
1. The customer touched her **once / twice / three times**.
2. The waitress said: "Please **stop / don't do** that."
3. The customer said: "**What did you do that for / Why did you do that?**"

Part 3
1. The waitress says she can look after the baby for **5 / 10 / 15** minutes.
2. Jack says the baby's name is **Joan / John.**
3. Jack says "See you **soon / later**."
4. Jack says "thank you" **yes / no.**

In the kitchen
Part 4
1. The baby has **green / blue / gray** eyes.

In the restaurant
Part 5
1. The waitress says the baby is **pretty / beautiful / gorgeous.**
2. The waitress said she **cleaned / washed** the bottle.
3. Jack asked for the **check / bill.**

Part 6
1. The boss asked about the couple at table **3 / 4 / 7.**
2. The bill was for **25.50 / 26.50 / 27.50.**
3. **Jack / the waitress** is going to pay.

Figure 3. Viewing exercises for a sequence from *Jack and Sarah* (Parts 2-6).

Part 7
Who said it? Write A for Amy (the waitress), B for the boss, or J for Jack.
____ Wait a minute.
____ I'm sure it was.
____ Excuse me.
____ Stop! Wait!
____ Hey, what about the other bill?

Figure 4. Viewing exercises for a sequence from *Jack and Sarah* (Part 7).

Example Procedures for Teaching a Sequence From a Movie

The function of invitations and arrangements is often covered in elementary level courses. In a sequence from the romantic comedy *Gregory's Girl* (Parsons & Forsyth, 1981), Gregory finally plucks up the courage to invite Dorothy out on a date (1.00.27). Because the language used resembles that which is found in ELT textbook dialogues, it can complement or replace textbook material. A recommended procedure for presenting this movie sequence is to pause the video after Dorothy says "OK" in response to Gregory's initial invitation. See Appendix C for the script.

Elicit from the learners some examples of how the conversation may develop or what Sherman (2003) described as "anticipations" (p. 120). This procedure has dual benefits. First, it provides listening strategy training because it encourages learners to make predictions. This involves "using a context-implication strategy in which the listener projects schematic expectations onto the text" (Rost, 1990, p. 136). Second, based on these learner predictions, it allows the teacher to write some listening comprehension questions on the board or preferably type them up for projection on a screen. A computer or tablet can be used both to play the sequence from a DVD (or by accessing the movie from online video streaming sites) and as a digital whiteboard for displaying questions. It is normally possible to elicit the following comprehension questions without too much prompting:

- When are they going to meet?
- What time are they going to meet?
- Where are they going to meet?
- What are they going to do?

Co-construction of questions with learners creates a welcome opportunity for the teaching of grammar and vocabulary within the context of the task.

With the task thus set, learners are primed and hopefully motivated to view the sequence. Following the first viewing, to generate further communication and language practise, it is preferable to have learners ask and attempt to answer the questions in pairs before open class discussion of the answers. This activity helps to counter the perceived disadvantage of students remaining passive in class when watching movies. Although there is no answer, including the final question is a deliberate strategy to provide a reason to replay the sequence as there is often broad agreement and confidence in the answers to the other three questions. A key teaching strategy here is to avoid confirming the accuracy of answers provided by the class because learners can usually verify the answers by reading the movie script. However, if it is necessary for learners to read the script to assess their success, this may be a positive outcome because it generates a reason to read the script. One unusual feature of this particular sequence is that it is possible to avoid playing the sequence a second time to check answers to the comprehension questions because Gregory, in the very next part of the sequence (1.03.50), pursues Dorothy into the changing room to confirm details of the date.

The next step is to have the students read the script silently for answer checking either by distributing a handout or by projecting it onto a screen. A useful follow-up activity is to play the sequence a third and final time, perhaps with subtitles displayed, so that students can hear and hopefully recognize parts of the dialog that they may have found incomprehensible in the first two exposures to the movie sequence. Finally, for further active learner participation, students can read aloud or act out the conversation in pairs.

Additional Active Movie Viewing Tasks and Activities

Using Scripts for Active Learning

Bearing in mind the reservations about the tendency for passive learner behaviour when watching movies, teachers need other ideas for promoting more active learning tasks based on movie sequences—activities that move away from the circling of answers towards tasks that involve kinesthetic energy. One of these is a type of strip story (Gibson, 1975). Print out some lines from a script and cut them into strips. After playing the sequence without sound, the task for the learners, preferably in pairs, is to arrange the strips in order. The sequence can then be played with sound so learners can listen and check if their ordering is correct. See Dialog Cards from Stempleski and Tomalin (1990, p. 47) for variations of this activity.

A second idea is based on Combining Versions described by Ur (1981). For this activity, the teacher will need to prepare two different but parallel versions of the same movie script (see example in Figure 6). Both versions should contain some actual lines from the script and other lines that are different. After watching the sequence without sound, learners in pairs try to find the discrepancies between their different versions without looking at their partner's version. Through discussion, the task is to choose which parts are correct and which are not in terms of meaning and appropriacy. By combining the different versions, learners will also write out the actual lines of the best version before checking it by viewing the sequence again with sound.

VERSION A
JACK Don't do it!
ROSE Stay back! Don't go any closer!
JACK Just take my hand! I'll push you back over.
ROSE Yes! Stay where you are. I mean it. I won't let go.

VERSION B
JACK Let's do it!
ROSE Come back! Don't come any closer!
JACK Just take my finger! I'll pull you back over.
ROSE No! Stay where I am. I don't mean it. I'll let go.

CORRECT VERSION
JACK Don't do it!
ROSE Stay back! Don't come any closer!
JACK Just take my hand! I'll pull you back over.
ROSE No! Stay where you are. I mean it. I'll let go.

Figure 6. Combining Versions task (Munby, 2002) for a sequence from *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997).

Speaking Tasks and Discussion Springboards

To generate more language, a pairwork information gap activity can be created. Student A in each pair is allowed to view a short clip without sound while Student B closes her eyes. The task is for Student A to explain what she has seen. For example, in the restaurant sequence from *Jack and Sarah*, pause the film as Amy begins to carry a tray with cups of coffee towards the customers. Instruct all Student Bs to close their eyes, turn off the sound, and allow all Student As to watch until Amy leaves the restaurant. She trips over a bag that has dropped off from Jack's stroller, and the hot coffees fly through the air and land on the table where three men are sitting. Student As then explain what happened to Student Bs.

Another way to generate discussion is to watch a sequence together, then invite learners to guess what happens next. Open-ended discussion questions based on the content of the movie can also be effective for developing spoken fluency and personalization. After viewing the sequence from *Jack and Sarah*, the following questions can serve as discussion springboards:

- Have you ever worked as a waiter or waitress? If not, would you like to? If you have, did you have any bad experiences?
- Have you ever had any experiences with babies?
- Do you think this kind of sexual harassment should be punished?
- Should Amy, the waitress, have to pay for the couple who left without paying?
- Should Amy be fired?

Finally, role-plays can be set up, with students taking roles of characters and new sequences imagined. For this sequence, the imagined situation is that Student A is Amy, who returns to the restaurant the next day and asks for her job back. Student B is the boss.

A Project

The sequence from *Jack and Sarah* and accompanying tasks can serve as a model for a project in which learners, perhaps in groups, choose their own favourite movie sequences and create their own scripts, viewing exercises, and discussion activities for presentation in a student-led class. For details, see Munby (2004).

Conclusion

Although being able to understand movies in a foreign language is a commonly stated goal of language learners, there are some potential drawbacks in using them in the classroom. However, teachers can overcome the drawbacks and enjoy the advantages by selecting short sequences to use in class. Among the vast resource of movies we currently have at our disposal, it is often possible to find examples of language functions, service encounters, and cultural phenomena that exist in the class textbook. By carefully selecting short sequences and integrating them into regular language courses with specially designed viewing tasks, teachers should be able to provide students with success in listening comprehension. With this in mind, it is always a good idea for teachers to keep notes of teachable sequences when watching movies for pleasure.

Bio Data

Ian Munby is a full-time lecturer at Hokkai Gakuen University, Sapporo. He holds an MA in TEFL from Reading University and a PhD in vocabulary acquisition studies from the University of Wales Swansea, UK (now renamed as Swansea University). He has been

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Appendix A

Creating a Movie Script From a SubRip Text

A downloaded movie script will often resemble the SubRip text in Figure A1.

```
790
01:00:26,320 → 01:00:30,040
Also, would you like to come out with me?

791
01:00:30,080 → 01:00:32,080
OK.
```

Figure A1. A SubRip dialog from the movie *Gregory's Girl.*

A recommended procedure for cleaning up a SubRip script for classroom use is as follows:

1. Go to Compleat Lexical Tutor (http://www.lextutor.ca/), open Text Tools, open The Compleat Stripper, and copy in the script that you have downloaded from the Internet.
2. Click on *Remove figures* to take out all the time code numbers (although it will also remove other numbers in the dialog that you will need to reinsert later.)
3. Click on *Remove spaces* to make final editing more convenient.
4. Copy and paste the text to a Word document. Use the *Find and replace* function (with *Replace* left blank) to remove the remaining unwanted features such as ": : , -- : :" and "→".
5. Watch the movie to record and insert brief details of each sequence's location, time codes for the beginning of each sequence, and the names of the characters in capitals as in Figure A2.

Football ground (01.03.00)
GREGORY Also, would you like to come out with me?
DOROTHY OK.

Figure A2. A completed script dialog from the movie *Gregory's Girl*.

Appendix B
Vocabulary List for a Sequence From Jack and Sarah.

bet
I bet (you). (口語)
1. 確かに, 大丈夫, そのとおり.
2. [疑いを示して] 怪しいもんだ, さあどうかね
broody 考え込む, むっつりした.
chérie darling (in French)
dumb ばか
heat it up 温める
goo《名》[U] (口語)
1. ねばつく[べたつく]もの.
2. べたべたした甘い言葉[感傷].
& glue の変形;《形》gooey'
gorgeous 見事な, すてきな, すばらしい
trip つまずき

Appendix C
Script for a Sequence From Jack and Sarah

INT. RESTAURANT. DAY (00.40.16-00.43.53)
WAITRESS Hi.
JACK Hi.
WAITRESS Isn't he beautiful! How old?
JACK She's fourteen weeks.
WAITRESS Is he yours?
JACK No, I stole her.
WAITRESS OK. Dumb question. What'll it be?
JACK I'd like the hamburger, rare with whatever it comes with.
WAITRESS Anything to drink?
JACK Coffee, cappuccino.
WAITRESS And what about gorgeous? Anything for him?
JACK He's, she's fine, I've got something for her.
WAITRESS Right. Do you want me to heat it up?
JACK Oh, that'd be great. Yes. She prefers it warm. Made it myself.
WAITRESS Hmm. I bet you did.
JACK One hamburger rare, one cappuccino, and one goo.
WAITRESS Thanks.

CUSTOMER How's my favourite waitress then?
He touched her on the back of the thigh
WAITRESS Please don't do that.
He touched her on the back of the thigh again. She knocked a bottle of beer over him
WAITRESS Oh, I'm sorry.
CUSTOMER What did you do that for?
WAITRESS It was an accident.
CUSTOMER Yeah. Course it was.
BOSS Bring the gentleman another beer. Now.

WAITRESS Here, let me do that. You should eat.
JACK Aren't you busy?
WAITRESS Oh, I'll be all right for ten minutes. What's his name?
JACK Err John. His name's John.
WAITRESS OK. Well let's go John.
JACK See you later.

WAITRESS Look at those big blue eyes.
BOSS Getting broody, Amy?
AMY If I was, you'd be the last to know.

AMY How are you doing?
JACK Great. Just great. Thank you very much.
AMY Sure. Here, I washed his bottle, too. He's a gorgeous baby.
JACK Yes, I think so, too.
AMY Anything else?
JACK Just the bill, please.
AMY Right.

AMY Check for number three, please.
BOSS The couple at number 7?
AMY They're not finished yet.
BOSS Then where are they, chérie?

AMY How much do I owe?
BOSS That's 27 pounds and fifty pence, not including service.
AMY Tell me, Alain. Did you see them leaving?
BOSS Coffees for table 4 please.

JACK I'll pay the other bill as well.
BOSS Were they friends of yours?
JACK Why don't you just shut it and let me pay the bill?
BOSS Certainly. It makes no difference to me.
JACK I'm sure it doesn't
(Amy tripped over Jack's shopping bag and spilled the coffee all over the four male customers.)
BOSS Amy!
AMY Don't bother, I'm leaving.
JACK Wait a minute. You can't fire her for that.
BOSS I didn't, she resigned.
JACK But it was my fault.
BOSS I'm sure it was.
AMY Excuse me.
JACK Stop! Wait!
(Amy ran out of the cafe and Jack picked up the money he offered to pay for table 7.)
BOSS Hey, what about the other bill?
JACK You're right. I didn't know them after all.

Appendix D
Script for a Sequence From Gregory's Girl

FOOTBALL GROUND (01.03.00)
GREGORY Would you like to come out with me?
DOROTHY OK.
GREGORY Eh? Um, I... I mean on a... a kind of date.
DOROTHY I said OK.
GREGORY Oh, come one. Stop fooling around. I mean a real sort...
DOROTHY If you're going to argue about it, forget it.
GREGORY No! No. Fine. When?
DOROTHY Tonight... half past 7:00, at the clock in the plaza.

CHANGING ROOM (01.03.50)
Knock at the door.
DOROTHY Yeah?
GREGORY I just wanted to check.
DOROTHY Yeah?
GREGORY Tonight?

DOROTHY Tonight.
GREGORY Yeah. Half 7:00?
DOROTHY Half past 7:00.
GREGORY And you'll be there?
DOROTHY I'll be there.
GREGORY And I'll be there.
DOROTHY Mmhmmm.
GREGORY At the clock.
DOROTHY At the clock.