

Effective Ways of Using *Mr. Bean* for Lower-Level Students

Mayumi Hamada

Ryutsu Kagaku University

Hiroimi Akimoto

Akashi National College of Technology

PAC3
at
JALT
2001

Conference
Proceedings



International
Conference
Centre

Kitakyushu
JAPAN

November
22-25, 2001

This article presents effective ways of using the British comedy, *Mr. Bean*, for lower-level students. We first discuss the characteristics of *Mr. Bean* and the reasons why it is an excellent teaching material. Then, we introduce a lesson plan mainly focusing on speaking and vocabulary.

本稿はイギリスのコメディ、*Mr. Bean*の効果的活用法を初級レベル学習者対象に述べたものである。*Mr. Bean*の特徴と*Mr. Bean*がすぐれた教材である理由を示し、スピーキングと語彙に焦点をあてた授業案を提示する。

Film can be great material for language classes. “It is motivating, and it provides a source of authentic and varied language” (Stempleski & Tomalin, 2001, p.1). However, using film is not as easy as it seems, especially for lower-level students. The British comedy *Mr. Bean* can solve some of



the problems that teachers encounter when using regular films.

Why *Mr. Bean*?

Shown below are the characteristics of *Mr. Bean* and the advantages of using it in classes.

No listening

Listening to authentic materials, including films, is generally too difficult because they are not graded for second language learners (Underwood, 1989). However, *Mr. Bean*'s episodes have almost no dialogue, so there is no listening. This makes them especially suitable for lower-level students because the teachers don't have to consider their students' listening ability.

"No listening" is also good for speaking exercises. If there is no dialogue, the students can freely imagine what people say in the episodes, and they can make sentences according to their own level. There is always more than one possible way to describe a particular situation and the students don't have to be restricted by what they hear, which often happens when a regular film is used.

Another advantage of "no listening" is that the students can relax and focus more on the content itself. Since they don't have to catch any key words, they can enjoy the episode itself and laugh to their heart's content.

Short episodes

Another important characteristic of *Mr. Bean* is that most of the episodes are short. From the teacher's point of view, this is very convenient because it's very easy to incorporate this material into a lesson.

Ur (1984) explains the difficulty of using films because of their length. When the whole film is used, it takes a great amount of class time. Segmentation can be also difficult.

In addition, film selection will be crucial because if the selected film is not interesting to the students or not appropriate for their level, the whole term may be ruined. Using short segments seems easier to handle and motivating enough (Harmer, 2001), but it can also be time-consuming and difficult. It's not very easy to find a short, appropriate segment in terms of the level, topic, interest, length, and language.

Using *Mr. Bean* is one possible solution for the problems mentioned above. Since *Mr. Bean*'s episodes are short, no segmentation is required. Therefore, the lesson planning will be easy and quick. The teacher can choose an episode he/she likes and finish it in one class easily. It can be used both as a main material and supplementary material.

From the students' point of view, *Mr. Bean*'s episodes are short enough to concentrate on, so they don't even have time to get bored. They can enjoy a different episode and different topic in every lesson.

Easy-to-understand comedy

Mr. Bean is an easy-to-understand comedy, so it's enjoyable to talk about what he does. Comedies are fun, but jokes are sometimes very difficult to understand. Especially if a joke is culturally based, non-native speakers can't appreciate and laugh at it. *Mr. Bean's* humor, however, is visual and based on his silly actions, so everybody can understand it.

Familiar topics

Most of the topics in *Mr. Bean's* episodes, such as eating at a restaurant, shopping at a department store, and so on, are related to daily life and so are familiar to the students. Therefore, the students can practice phrases and expressions they often encounter in everyday conversation.

Lesson Plan

Below is a 90-minute lesson plan for lower-level students using the episode "Dentist." The main target skills are vocabulary and speaking. This lesson plan consists of four different elements: *Vocabulary*, *Comprehension Questions*, *Speaking*, and *Discussion*. Although this set of exercises is designed for a 90-minute class, it can also be adapted to a shorter minute class depending on how long the teacher spends on each exercise.

Vocabulary

This is a pre-viewing and warming-up exercise where the students can learn necessary vocabulary for the following exercises. First, the teacher shows the students a passage such as "When you have a toothache, you go to the (). Be sure to make an () before you get there. First you talk to a () and wait in the () for your turn..." Then they fill in the blanks with appropriate words that are related to going to the dentist. In class, the teacher should get them to pronounce each word twice or three times because they have to use the words later in the *Speaking* exercise.

Comprehension Questions

After the students watch the episode on the video, the teacher shows five to seven very simple statements about the episode. Some examples are, "Mr. Bean wanted to read a fashion magazine," or "He poured water onto the boy's head." Each statement has one mistake and the students have to find the mistake and correct it. After they make corrections, they can check the answers with their partners. Then the teacher can ask some students to share their answers orally.

Speaking

Speaking is an oral pair practice and one of the main exercises. In this exercise, the students are required to talk in pairs about what happened in the episode. First,

the teacher pauses the video at a point where Mr. Bean uses a meaningful gesture or a facial expression and asks the students to guess what Mr. Bean might have said. One of the good places to stop and talk is the scene where Mr. Bean turns over the X-ray after he treats his teeth himself. Then the students write an answer freely. Next, they share their answer orally with their classmate. We made a video recording while our students were struggling with this exercise. Some of their answers were “Oh, mistake,” “This X-ray can turn,” and “Is this back or front?” Their sentences were not perfect but they were very creative.

Discussion

Discussion is a more challenging speaking exercise. It can be done either in pairs or in small groups. The students

are required to express their own opinion regarding a related topic in this activity. First, the teacher shows them symptoms such as “toothache,” “fever,” and “insomnia.” Then the students think and write a remedy for each symptom. After that, they share their answers orally with their partners.

Conclusion

We asked our students how they liked using *Mr. Bean* in class. Nearly 80 % of the students gave us positive feedback. It is possible to create many different kinds of activities using *Mr. Bean*. *Mr. Bean* can be adapted to any level, skill, and class.

References

- Harmer, J. (2001). *The practice of English language teaching*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Stempleski, S. & Tomalin, B. (2001). *Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Underwood, M. (1989). *Teaching listening*. New York: Longman.
- Ur, P. (1984). *Teaching listening comprehension*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.