Captioned Video Movies as a Teaching Tool in TESOL

Tony Skevington*

Abstract

Captioned video movies are now widely available. Although initially intended for hearing-impaired native speakers they can become a valuable aid in foreign language learning and teaching. This paper begins by discussing the theoretical basis for using captioned movies in the language classroom. The writer then describes teaching techniques which can be used to teach the four skills and cross-cultural awareness through captioned movies. Finally, the author looks at some of the problems in this kind of teaching and suggests ways of overcoming them.

Introduction

Today most video tapes of major new films are made with captions showing the dialogue. These captions can be either 'open' or 'closed', i.e. seen on the screen or hidden. If a film is closed captioned then the captions can be shown by the use of a machine called a caption decoder which is connected to a video deck and a TV set.

Captioned video films first became available in the mid-1980s and were designed for hearing-impaired native speakers. However, teachers of foreign languages in various parts of the world quickly realized their potential as an aid in helping students to learn a foreign language, (target language - TL).

In this paper I will discuss the use of captioned video materials, specifically, movies, in teaching English as a second language. I will begin by noting some of the pedagogical advantages of this kind of material and then discuss some of the ways they can be used in the classroom. Finally, I will examine some of the problems associated with using captioned films and offer some suggestions for overcoming these problems. In the paper I will draw heavily on my own experience of using captioned movies and the materials I have produced for courses I have taught.

I. Pedagogical Advantages of Using Captioned Movies

Stempleski and Tomalin (1990) saw four main benefits of using video as a tool for language teaching: motivation, communication, non-verbal aspects of communication and cross-cultural

---

＊ 英語コミュニケーション学科助教授

comparison; to these I would add two other advantages, student-centredness and four-skills application. Let us now look at all these points in detail.

Motivation

As language research has shown for a very long time now, and indeed as life experience shows, motivation is one of the greatest spurs to achievement. Gardner and Lambert's pioneering work into the part played by motivation in second language learning in the early 1970s distinguished between two kinds of motivation, integrative and instrumental (Harmer, 1991). Integrative motivation occurs when the learner is attracted to the culture of the TL and in some cases wishes to be integrated into it. Instrumental motivation on the other hand is where a person is learning a language in order to progress in her career or gain higher status in some form. What kind of motivation does the typical Japanese student in tertiary education have? This is a very difficult question to answer. As far as this writer is aware very little research has been done in this area, certainly at a national level. Most learners of English in Japanese higher educational institutions are not English majors. From personal and anecdotal experience it would seem that most Japanese students lack both instrumental and integrative motivation. There is, however, one overriding motivating factor for almost all students, i.e. to pass the class. This is, of course, not the place to discuss the rather sad fact that so much time and effort (on the part of the teachers at least) is put into an activity, (TESOL), which has, generally, such poor results. However, and again this is a personal and anecdotal observation, it seems that there are certain aspects of Western culture that do interest the vast majority of young Japanese students. What is generally termed 'popular culture' has great appeal for the youth of the world and Japanese youth is no exception. This popular culture manifests itself in four main areas: music, film, fashion, sport. Much could be written about how all four of these topics could be used as ways of increasing student motivation to learn English and other languages, however, this paper will concern itself with film only. With the invention of video, and more especially, captioned video, it became possible to use the motivating factor of students' interest in movies in the language classroom. I believe that nearly all teachers who have used video as part of their teaching will have noticed an increase of interest when he/she comes to the point in the lesson where they say, "O.K. Now let's watch some video". The reasons for this interest in video are varied, among them are: most students have been used to watching and enjoying TV all their lives, video brings the world into the classroom, it is a break from listening to and looking at the teacher! By using a video a teacher has immediately gained the interest and attention of all but the most recalcitrant of the students. How much truer this is if the video is of a famous or currently popular movie. Later in this paper I will discuss the methodology for using captioned movies to teach the four skills, but the point I want to make here is that by using video a teacher, even before he/she begins the pedagogical tasks, has already achieved the most effective tool in learning, i.e. he/she has greatly enhanced student motivation.

Communication

The second advantage of using captioned movies in TESOL is to help students to understand and communicate in the TL. "The outstanding feature of video films is their ability to present complete communicative situations" (Longeran, 1984, p.4). If we consider all other activities in the language classroom (apart from some teacher-student interaction) movies are the closest that learners come to experiencing the TL in reality (although, of course, movies too are not 'real' for a variety of reasons, e.g. they have been scripted, they are acted, etc.). Short of taking our students out of the classroom and putting them in situations where they have to interact in the TL (obviously not a feasible option in most teaching situations)movies are the ideal vehicle for exposing our students to the TL. However, not only do movies enable the students to hear and see the TL in (hopefully) interesting/exciting contexts, but they give the experienced and innovative teacher opportunities to set up a myriad of communicative activities.

Non-verbal aspects of communication

Stempleski and Tomalin (1990) cite the psychologist Robert Merbain as saying that 80% of human communication is non-verbal. Of course many gestures, especially those showing moods and emotions, are universal, but many are also culture-specific and movies are a very good way of introducing these to students of a foreign language.

A great deal of work can be done on non-verbal communication and much of it can be of a light-hearted and entertaining nature. Working on aspects of non-verbal communication can also help to lower what Stephen Krashen called the 'affective filters' (i.e. those things which make students less ready to respond to learning) by making students aware of the universality of human communication and its uses.

Cross-cultural comparisons

Video movies are one of the greatest sources of cross-cultural comparison. Through movies the whole world of the TL can be brought into the classroom and used to enhance language learning and also understanding of the culture(s) of a foreign language. Movies can show ways in which a culture (or specific aspects of it) operates today or operated in the past. One of the great benefits of cross-cultural work is that it often helps students to think about the mores of their own culture. Native speaker teachers too may gain insights into their own culture by the reactions and comments of their students to cultural content of movies.

Student-centered classes

The idea of the student-centred lesson grew out of the communicative method which became fashionable in the 1970s. Although the communicative method has been adapted to meet the changing beliefs and fads about language learning, one of its main components, i.e. that lessons should be based on students' needs and interests, has remained in situ. As noted

earlier, most students are interested in movies and, by using films, we can help to motivate them. If possible teachers should discuss with students which movies they would like to use in class. It may not always be possible to meet students' requests, but teachers should at least try and choose movies which have some interest to the students or relevance to their lives. Having decided on a movie the teacher should design materials around it which give the students as much opportunity as possible to meet their language needs. Thus the teacher will escape the danger of running teacher-centred classes and become instead what Harmer (1991) calls a 'facilitator ' for his/her students.

Four-skills application

Whether captioned movies are the main materials of a course or merely one component of it they are very suitable to teaching all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). The weighting given to the four skills on a particular course will depend in large measure on the needs of the students. Obviously listening, speaking and cross-cultural awareness are the skills which can be most readily practiced through captioned video, but writing and reading components can also be built into a course by an innovative teacher. One important point to remember is that captioned movies should not be seen as merely a way of entertaining the students; a teacher should have overall goals for each movie he/she uses and also specific learning aims for each segment of the film shown. The teacher needs to know a movie well before he or she begins teaching with it, and to decide how it can best be utilized to meet the students' needs in learning the TL.

II. Methodology of Captioned Movies

Needs and aims

When thinking about the methodology to be used with captioned movies a teacher has to first consider three things, main goals to be achieved, language level of the students, amount of course time which can be given to a movie.

The main goals can be decided through a needs analysis of the students and how a movie can help realize those needs. One way to do this is to take a four-skills approach; how much and what kind of work do the students need to do on their listening, speaking, reading and writing? In which ways can this movie be used to help the students achieve these needs? The simplest way to discover how a film may best be exploited is to view it a few times and then complete a form along the lines of the Movie Utilization Form shown in Appendix I. Using this kind of form will help a teacher to focus clearly on a movie and what his/her general and specific goals would be in using the movie.

A movie can be exploited in different ways depending on the students' needs. One group of students may need a great deal of work on listening, another group may need more cultural awareness training, such as students on a pre-departure course. One movie may lend itself to

exploitation for a writing class. Some movies are based on novels and may be used as a supplement to a reading course.

Instead of designing a course based on a four skills approach a teacher may decide to use a movie in an integrative way, using it to practice all four skills to some degree and not separating the skills out so distinctly. This is the method I have generally used as my classes have not been based on students with instrumental needs or motivation. With an integrative approach more work tends to be done on listening and speaking, with reading and writing used as reinforcement to oral and aural work. Cross-cultural awareness is a very good theme for preparing materials based on an integrative approach.

The language level of the students is one of the main factors a teacher should consider when deciding how to use a movie in the classroom. The length of viewing time in particular lessons, the kinds of tasks set the students, the students' ability to deal with the difficulty of the screenplay, and other matters, will largely be determined by the language level of the students. Obviously the more advanced a class the more complex the tasks a teacher can set. However, one of the great advantages of captioned movies is that they can be exploited in many ways, even with students with a low level of language ability.

The amount of course time to be devoted to a movie also greatly influences decisions on methodology. Are you going to use captioned movies as the main component of a course or are you going to use them occasionally as a supplement? Are you going to use the film on a 'micro' or a 'macro' level? Tomalin (1986) believes 4-5 minutes of viewing time provides enough material for a 50 minute lesson. This would be using the film on a micro level, i.e. using it to teach specific language points in an intensive way. As Tomalin says, video is a 'dense' medium, i.e. gives all kinds of information, visual, aural, cultural in a very short space of time and one movie (typically of 120 minutes) could easily be used for a whole academic year if shown once a week.

Stempleski and Tomalin (1990) give different lengths of viewing time depending on the goals and tasks set. Using a movie at a macro level would involve showing longer segments or even the whole movie at one sitting. If a movie is used in this way obviously the aims and methodology are going to be different from a micro use.

When a teacher has completed his/her movie utilization form he/she can begin drawing up a detailed syllabus.

Designing a syllabus

After completing a movie utilization form a teacher then needs to plan his/her syllabus for the particular movie he/she is going to use. The way I approach this task is to complete a syllabus design grid (SDG - Appendix II). I will now describe in some detail the pedagogical basis for each of the ways of using segments of the movie (shown along the top line of the grid) and I will also give examples of tasks which can be set for each of the four skills and cross-cultural awareness.

In order to simplify matters I am going to base my order of description on Appendix II, but all of these stages do not necessarily have to be used for every movie sequence, nor do they have to be done in the order shown on the chart. The SDG should be used to show the tasks the teacher will set for each segment of the film, so that by the end of a movie a teacher might have a folder containing say ten SDGs, which would constitute a complete syllabus for that particular film.

One point to note is that before beginning showing a movie the teacher should prepare the students for it. This can be done in a number of ways, e.g. a mini-lecture on the main theme of the film, a written description of the plot, a class discussion on the theme of the movie, the stars, similar movies students have seen, etc. Another point is that after students have completed work on the first segment of the movie the following classes offer a great opportunity for all kinds of revision and reinforcement work in the four skills.

Teaching techniques

Sound only

The aim of this kind of presentation is to improve listening skills. The complexity of the tasks set will depend on the students' level. Below are some tasks which could be set.

<u>Listening</u>   i. Students have to identify speakers (if they have seen them in previous viewings). ii. Where is the action taking place? iii. What is the main topic of the dialogue? iv. How are the characters feeling? v. Summarize what happened.

<u>Speaking</u>   i. Discuss what happened. ii. Predict what will happen next. iii. Discuss reasons for characters' actions.

<u>Reading</u>   i. Read a transcript of the dialogue. ii. Read a summary of the action. iii. Read an article related to the action.

<u>Writing</u>   i. While listening - complete parts of the dialogue missing from a worksheet. ii. After listening - in pairs, try to reconstruct some of the dialogue. iii. Write a summary of what happened.

Vision only

In this kind of presentation students see the action but they hear nothing. As noted earlier, our eyes enable us to understand a great deal of communication. Presenting the scenes without sound gives students a chance to guess at the dialogue, internalize the ideas in their L1, translate into the TL.

<u>Speaking</u>   i. Describe scenes and scenery. ii. Discuss what happened. iii. Why did the characters behave as they did? iv. Your reaction to the scenes. v. What will happen next?

<u>Reading</u>   i. Read a description of some of the scenes. ii. Read a passage related to incidents which happened in the scenes. iii. Read a description of the action.

<u>Writing</u>   i. While viewing - answer questions on a worksheet. ii. Complete a chart. iii.

Summarize what happened. iv. Why do you think the characters behaved as they did?
Cross-cultural comparison   Discuss/write i. Physical aspects of the scenes, e.g. house interiors, landscape. ii. Behaviour of the characters. iii. Your opinion of the characters' behaviour.

Sound and vision

Students now see the movie in its most usual form, they can match the visual and the aural. This method of presenting the material enables students to watch semi-authentic communication in the TL and to consider all aspects of the interaction between the characters.
Listening   i. While viewing - complete dialogues on a worksheet. ii. Translate dialogues into L1. iii. After viewing - complete dialogues.
Speaking   i. Before viewing - what do you think will happen next? ii. After viewing - discuss the dialogue. iii. Practice some of the dialogue. iv. Reenact a scene. v. Discuss characters' behaviour.
Reading   i. Before viewing - read a description of up-coming segment. ii. While viewing - read parts of the dialogue. iii. After viewing - description of why characters have behaved the way they have. iv. Passages related to action in the scenes. v. Out-of-class assignment - find articles related in some way to the action of the sequence.
Writing   i. Before viewing - write summary of the story so far or what happened in the last sequence. ii. While viewing - answer questions on a worksheet. iii. Take notes on dialogue/action. iv. After viewing - write part of the dialogue. v. Give reasons for characters' actions.
Cross-cultural comparisons   i. How would the characters have behaved in your culture? ii. Power relationships between the characters. iii. Body language of the characters.

Sound, vision,, caption

[One point to note here is that most captioned video movies do not have a word for word transcription of the dialogue spoken by the actors. One reason for this is reading speed; the standard reading speed in English is 200 words per minute whereas captioned movies cater for a reading speed of 120 words per minute, therefore, dialogue is sometimes put into a glossed shortened form (Wood and Ishii, 1991).]
In presenting the material in this form students are given the most help to comprehend what is happening. This form of presentation is very useful for very weak and very advanced students. What will be different will be the aims of the presentation and the tasks set for the students.
Tasks   In all four skills and for cultural comparisons similar tasks that have already been described can be used, though at a more complex level.
As noted earlier, the way one presents captioned movies can be varied according to students' needs and levels. The system I have favoured is the sequence of, view only, view with sound, view with sound and captions, (see example of worksheet produced on this basis in Appendix

III). By the third viewing students are familiar with the scenes and dialogue and can be set more difficult tasks. It should also be noted that I have isolated the tasks along the lines of the four skills, this is obviously an artificial division, as there is usually an overlap between skills, e.g. listening and speaking, reading and writing, speaking and reading. Other teachers, therefore, might want to design a syllabus based on a more integrative approach.

III. Some Problems in Using Captioned Movies

This paper claims that there are many pedagogical advantages to using captioned video movies, and also numerous methodologically interesting ways of utilizing them. There are also, however, various problems which may also arise, in this the final part of the paper I will discuss these.

Technical

As with the use of all audio-visual aids in the classroom, the teacher has to know his/her equipment well. This usually presents few problems as once the three pieces of equipment (TV, video deck, caption adapter) have been linked up correctly everything should work smoothly. It is better if one can have the connections permanently in situ, however, this is often not possible as other teachers will probably want to use the TV or video.

Therefore, the teacher using the caption machine should practice how to connect the equipment quickly and correctly, preferably before the class begins. The decoder is a lightweight small machine which can easily be carried by the teacher to and from the classroom if necessary. The decoder also has a remote control which makes it very simple to hide or show the captions. The teacher also needs remote controls to operate various functions of the video machine and TV. One soon becomes adept at juggling all these remote controls and making sure the machines are angled in the right direction to receive commands. Therefore, technically, provided the equipment is well serviced, there should be few problems and these are easily solved once one becomes familiar with the equipment. As a courtesy to other teachers using the classroom a teacher should also make sure that the TV and video machine are reconnected properly after using the caption decoder.

Language level

Movies are of course intended for native speakers and therefore the language is 'scripted authentic'. This poses a number of difficulties for the language teacher, especially with learners at the lower levels of ability. With elementary to lower intermediate learners a teacher needs to do careful preparatory work before showing the movie because it is very demoralizing if students find they understand very little of the dialogue. For this reason I often show the scenes first with no sound, rather than beginning with sound only. By viewing first students can usually understand the gist of what is happening. Beginning with sound only is perhaps better left for higher level students. If the language level of the dialogue is very

difficult or the story-line is complicated one might begin by showing the movie with sight, sound and captions.

Whichever method one uses a worksheet should be prepared (see Appendix III) which includes vocabulary work based on the dialogue. This may be in the form of pre-viewing translation of words and phrases or a teacher's glossary, especially for idioms and slang used in the dialogue.

During various stages of the lesson one can pause the video and discuss what is being said and also carry out remedial work on vocabulary and grammar if necessary.

However, the main purpose of using captioned movies is to enhance students' communicative competence, therefore, the emphasis should be on general understanding and one should not become bogged down in intensive language work.

The main point to remember is that the lower the language level of the students the more pre-viewing preparation will be necessary.

Choosing the movies

The ideal way to choose the movies to use on a course is to discuss it with the class first. Of course there will not always be consensus amongst the students, but the teacher may arrive at a choice which is popular with the majority. If it is not possible to consult the students or obtain the movie they want then the teacher must use his/her judgement according to the needs/interests of the students. It is important for the teacher not to choose his/her favourite movies, but rather to make an intelligent guess at what is likely to appeal to the students.

Sex, taboo language and violence

Many modern popular films contain explicit sex scenes, 'bad language' (taboo) and violence. How should a teacher deal with these things? Regarding the sex scenes, it depends how graphic they are whether a teacher decides to censor them completely or just sit in embarrassment at the back of the classroom and pass over them without comment. The teacher's way of dealing with this aspect of a movie will also depend on other factors, such as, the age of the students, the gender of the students, the gender of the teacher.

Taboo language presents interesting problems. Does one ignore it, give a translation or gloss into students' L1? Skevington (1998) discusses in some detail the various ways of dealing with taboo language in TESOL.

Violence seems ubiquitous in many popular modern movies, and it is especially an interesting topic in a country like Japan where the level of violence in the media is in no way a reflection of the level of violence in the society as a whole. However, in recent years Japanese society too is beginning to question whether there is a causal link between violence in the media and sensationally horrific crimes (especially those committed by young people) which are taken up and discussed by the news media. Therefore, the teacher has to exercise his/her judgment on deciding to censor violent scenes which may occur in the movies he/she is using.

Cultural density

Another problem with using movies as a tool in TESOL is that, as they are made for native speakers, they take for granted a great deal of knowledge of the cultural setting of a movie. Of course, some themes may be universal, personal/family relationships, love, marriage, death, etc., but how people behave in certain situations may be very culturally specific. The dialogues in movies may also make reference to well-known (in a specific culture) historical events, philosophical ideas, religious beliefs, etc., all of which would take up a great deal of class time to explain. The teacher, therefore, has to be careful in his/her choice of film, and also to decide how much time to spend on explaining cultural aspects of a film.

Lesson-preparation time

It might be assumed by some people that using captioned movies is an easy option for the teacher; turn on the TV to watch the movie, keep the students quiet and entertained and then have a light-hearted discussion about the movie afterwards. This is, of course, one way to use captioned movies, and may even be desirable from time to time on some courses. However, if one is going to use movies as a serious tool for enhancing language learning (as envisioned in this paper!) it will involve a great deal of preparation time on behalf of the teacher. Viewing the movie, drawing up a syllabus, preparing worksheets, testing, all of these activities take up many hours of work. Using a textbook is much simpler! However, for the teacher who is prepared to take the time and trouble to prepare materials, captioned movies are a very valuable aid to his/her teaching.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the advantages and disadvantages of using captioned video movies in TESOL. It represents one person's reflections on how best to utilize captioned movies, based on his limited experience. I hope the paper will be useful to other teachers and that some of the ideas and methodological techniques discussed in the paper will spur them on to make use of captioned movies in their teaching.

References

Harmer, Jeremy, (1991). The Practice of English Language Teaching. Harlow, Essex:
    Longman Group UK Limited.
Longeran, Jack (1984). Video in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge
    University Press.
Skevington, Tony (1998). Taboo Language in the EFL Classroom. Kanada University of

International Studies Journal, Volume 10, pp. 17-31

Stempleski, Susan and Tomalin, Barry (1990). Video in Action. Hemel Hempstead:
    Prentice Hall International (UK) Ltd.

Tomalin, Barry (1986). Video, TV and Radio in the English Class. London and Bas-
ingstoke:Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

Wood, David and Ishii, Yasuhito (1991) The Chikushi Jogakuen College Captioned Video
    Project. Journal of Chikushi Jogakuen College, No.3, pp.149-171.

Appendix I

Movie Utilization Form

Title of movie _____   Duration _____

Genre _____   Approx. classroom hours _____

Level _____

Intended class _____   No. of students _____

Main theme/plot_____

Main learning goals

Listening _____

Speaking _____

Reading _____

Writing _____

Cultural Awareness _____

Specific learning goals

Listening _____

Speaking _____

Reading _____

Writing _____

Cultural Awareness _____

Comments

_____

_____

_____

Appendix II

Syllabus Design Grid

	Sound only	View only	Sound/vision	Sound/vision/ captions
Listening				
Speaking				
Reading				
Writing				
Culture				

Appendix III

LA BAMBA (3) (15:23-27:01)　TONY SKEVINGTON

Translate these words into Japanese
briefcase _____　pregnant _____　marijuana _____
jealous _____ racist _____ audition _____　trailer _____

Without sound/captions

1. What does Bob have around his waist? _____

2. Describe the saxophone player? _____

3. What does the sax player think of Richie? _____

4. Why do you think Rosie gets angry?_____

5. What kind of place do Rosie and Bob live in?_____

6. What's Richie's mom doing when he comes home? _____

7. What's Donna wearing? _____

8. Who's the man with the briefcase? _____

9. Where's Richie's mom? _____

10. Why do you think Richie and his mom are upset? _____

With sound, no captions

1. What's the sax player's name? _____

2. What are they smoking? _____

3. Why doesn't Rosie open the door?_____

4. What news does Rosie tell Bob? _____

5. What's Bob's reaction to the news? _____

6. Why does Richie say he always carries a guitar? _____

7. Is Donna rich? _____

8. Why does Richie jump in the air? _____

Expressions

to split=to leave   son of a bitch=a bad person   a drag=boring bitch=bad woman

With sound and captions

1. What's Richie carrying? _____

2. What's the name of the band? _____

3. What does Richie tell his mom? _____

4. Are Rosie and Bob married?_____

5. Why does Rosie throw things at Bob? _____

6. What does Connie say about Bob and Rosie's argument? _____

7. Where does Richie invite Donna? _____

8. Do you think Donna's dad likes Richie? _____

9. Why does Connie come to the garage party? _____

10.Why do you think Richie didn't sing? _____

Put one of the following words in each space

seems   Silhouettes   but   is   an   him   Rosie   garage   her   Rudy   but

Rosie and Bob are living together____their relationship is not going well. _____

tells Bob she is pregnant_____he doesn't seem to care. Richie has_____audition

with a band called the_____,but the leader of the group,_____,is jealous of Richie and

doesn't give_____a chance to play at the_____party. Richie walks Donna home,

she_____to like him very much, but_____father is not pleased because Richie_____

not an Anglo-Saxon.

Complete the sentences

1. Rosie is _____

2. Rudy doesn't _____

3. Rosie tells Bob _____

4. Donna's father _____

5. At the garage party Richie _____

Speaking. Discuss the following in groups

1. Why do you think people take drugs?

2. Is it OK for a man to hit his wife/girlfriend sometimes?

3 .I could never have a foreign boyfriend.