

Films as Listening Material

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Introduction

The present article focuses on using films as listening material in the second and foreign language classroom. Watching movies is surely enjoyable for almost anyone, and it is probably true that whether a student is highly motivated or not, his or her interest in a foreign culture and its language can be awakened by movies. However, is it really effective pedagogy to have students learn a foreign language by merely watching movies? Movies are not made as language teaching materials — probably a major reason why watching them in the classroom is so much fun. Actually, I am now writing a textbook for developing listening skills using some short movies, and in the process of writing the textbook I have come across several issues related to the use of movies as listening materials that have motivated me write this article. Although movies can of course be used for developing cross-cultural understanding, here I limit the discussion to using films for developing listening skills.

First of all, I would like to consider what kind of movies are appropriate for use as listening material, including a discussion of the problems of copyright in Japan, level of difficulty rankings, and the presence or absence of captions. I will also discuss more practical issues, specifically the designing of a syllabus for a listening course. The syllabus presented will give priority to the prosodic features of utterances rather than individual speech sounds, an emphasis which is similar to an earlier examination of using nursery rhymes to develop students' prosodic skills (Iba, 1998 : 23), and the importance of learning these skills is stressed here again.

Whenever we recognize normal speech, we are processing prosodically determined variation, and prosody is, as Cutler, Dahan, and Donelaar (1997 : 141) have stated, "an intrinsic determination of the form of spoken language." Prosodic features need to be mastered to some degree to communicate effectively in the target language. Although it is not necessary to eliminate a foreign accent completely, students will feel a sense of accomplishment in coming closer to the natural use of the target language. As I have been

teaching English listening courses (introductory-level to advanced-level) at a university in Japan, I base my discussion on the use of movies with Japanese university students, though the points that I make can be applied to other contexts and target languages.

1. Films suitable for listening

1-1. Copyright

If you write a textbook based on a movie (or movies) and plan to get it published, you or the publishing firm will have to pay royalties on a copyright to the party (or parties) concerned. If you use a movie video in your classroom solely for educational purposes, this will usually not infringe on a copyright. However, we should remember that some copyright holders, such as Disney, are quite strict and uncompromising about their own rights. Years ago a teacher at a high school in Japan was accused by Disney of literary piracy simply because he showed a Disney video in his classroom. The interpretation of Japan's Copyright Law and other applicable laws does vary and has been changing recently, so I would like to make clear here what kinds of activities are legal or illegal in Japan at present. In fact, there are international copyright conventions and treaties to which most major countries are signatories, but there is no "international law" regarding copyright. Each country has its own copyright law and adopts the provisions of international treaties to the law, and a country's attitude toward copyright law will depend on its vested interests.

In Japan, the main provision concerning copyrighted materials for educational purposes is contained in two articles of the Japanese Copyright Law (1970) as follows :

Article 35

A person who is in charge of teaching in a school or other educational institution (excluding those established for profit making purposes) may reproduce a work made public to the extent deemed necessary for the purpose of using it in the course of teaching. Provided thus, this shall not apply if it *prejudices unreasonably* (my italics) the interests of the copyright owner in the light of the nature and use of the said work as well as the number of copies made and mode of reproduction.

Article 38

A work already made public may be publicly presented, performed, recited or presented cinematographically for non-profit making purposes

as long as no fees are charged to the audience or spectators.

The interpretation of these two articles is slightly different (Saito, 1992 ; Kato, 1994 ; Simons, 1995). The following may be a helpful guideline, yet it only provides for some of the possible contexts for the use of video materials.

- 1) Recording should be done by the teacher in charge of the class. Recordings made by another person would be illegal.
- 2) The educational institution for which the recording is done must be non-profit. Such institutions include private universities, but private language schools or cram schools are not considered to be included.
- 3) Copying audiovisual teaching materials or student workbooks for a class is not allowed.
- 4) Once the recorded material has been used, it should be discarded. Keeping the reproduced works in school or in a video library would be an infringement of the copyright law.

What makes copyright matters so complicated ? The phrase “prejudices unreasonably” in Article 35 seems to be sufficiently ambiguous that it could be subject to various interpretations. In addition to this, solutions will always lag behind technology. Until recently, copyright owners had been able to control their work because a transmitter was linked to a certain country. However, satellite broadcasting and the Internet are now essentially huge transmitters that extend far beyond the territory of any nation. Legal action against the illegal use of copyrighted materials in a computer network or through satellite broadcasting will be complicated and costly.

The video industry is generally concerned with video piracy rather than the use of videos in an educational institution. If you use a video illegally in the classroom, chances are that you would not be prosecuted by the copyright owner. The problem is, therefore, more ethical than legal. Most of us, however, would accept that we should not claim ignorance of the law as an excuse. Each educational authority should take the responsibility of creating a set of guidelines regarding copyright policy.

1-2. Levels of difficulty

Certain movies will be easier to understand than others because the vocabulary used in them is more basic than that of the others, the images aid comprehension, or the stories may be more straightforward and predictable. For example, movies that feature children are often easier to understand because there is usually little specialized vocabulary or slang in them.

Indeed there has been an attempt among language educators who use movie videos in the classroom to categorize movies into various proficiency levels such as “1) easy 2) moderately difficult 3) difficult” (Bamford, 1998 : 19), but it seems to me ratings of this kind are often lacking in objectivity. For example, it is not easy for me to understand why *Jurassic Park* is categorized as “difficult,” while *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is “moderately difficult.” Is *The Secret Garden* easy because the original is from juvenile literature ? I once used a five-minute clip of *The Secret Garden* in my class to show students how the nursery rhyme “Mary, Mary, quite contrary” was used in that film. Most of the students did not feel the movie was easy, even though the situation depicted was rather simple. They could not keep up with the speed or did not understand some prosodic features in the speech stream. As listening material for Japanese students, a movie like “*The Secret Garden*” might not best be categorized as “easy.”

As for the ratings of teaching materials, I am not against the idea of categorizing movies by level. It would be helpful for educators who plan to use a movie video in class if there were a proper list. However, we should remember that rating systems that are available, such as Leonard Maltin’s “Movie & Video Guide,” that are available are not applicable to Japanese students. They are made mostly for people living in the USA or other English speaking countries, which means that the criteria of the rating are not based on the difficulty of listening for non-native students, but on the abstract story concept or the contents of the movie itself. EFL or ESL specialists should rethink the problem and make a new rating of movies from their own perspective, but it will take a great deal of time and effort to put together such a list. To put the matter simply, the most basic criterion for choosing a movie video is that it includes a significant number of scenes containing natural dialogues.

1-3. Captions

Some English educators refuse to use movie videos with Japanese subtitles in the classroom because reading subtitles makes it unnecessary to process the English soundtrack. This view seems to be unnecessarily strict. I think it depends on the level of the students, and I personally use two types of captions for the same title if they are available : a video with English closed captions, and a video with Japanese subtitles. If the students are beginners, Japanese subtitles can be helpful for them in understanding the story. I mainly use movie videos with English closed captions, but for beginning students I sometimes use

a video with Japanese subtitles for the first viewing of the class to help the students understand the contents. This subject is taken up in the next section.

2. Syllabus

In this chapter, I will discuss several important points to consider when organizing the syllabus of a listening course using movie videos. In addition, a model syllabus will also be presented.

2-1. Priority of prosodic features

The term prosody has been used in various ways by different researchers, but in this article I would like to define the term as referring to rhythm, stress, and intonation — a definition which would probably be accepted by the majority of readers. It is generally agreed that discourse and conversation have structural characteristics and forms of organization of their own, independent of sentence-level grammar. Moreover, it is evident that prosody plays a key role in every day talk, especially for discourse-level interpretation. There can be no conversing without it. Recent research by phoneticians and phonologists has made major advances in identifying perceptual cues, such as shifts in intonation and rhythm, and in explaining their grammatical functions (Couper-Kuhlen, Selting 1996 : 11). Yet there still exists an established linguistic perspective that words, phrases and sentences make up the core of language and that prosody is somehow derivative and can be treated as a supplementary or a modulating factor.

This brings me to my second point. Judging from the situation in the academic field, we can easily imagine that the importance of prosody will seldom be questioned for its application to the classroom. If you look for a commercially available textbook for a listening course, you might be disappointed by your inability to find an appropriate one : most of the textbooks for listening courses place too much emphasis on listening comprehension. We must not neglect or ignore prosody but, in my opinion, help students become aware of it at the earliest stages of a listening course. (I include a unit of the textbook which I am writing with a colleague in the Appendix to give an example of how this might be done).

Every year at the beginning of my class, some students' utterances in English sound 'Japanese-like' because their rhythm is not stress-timed but syllable-timed, as it is in Japanese. In addition to this, their articulation of vowels and consonants in English sounds similar to the vowels and consonants of

Japanese. Yet after the series of lessons on prosody, most of their utterances change for the better, as I have shown in a previous article (Iba 1998 : 32). Such evidence strongly suggests, I believe, that prosodic features should be covered at the beginning of the listening course.

2-2. Listening process

In the proceeding section I have argued that some listening textbooks focus too much on listening comprehension. Students tend to spend time on answering questions by ticking one of the multiple choices in the textbook, not on listening to the sounds found in the material. As John Field (1998 : 111) pointed out, "A conventional listening comprehension lesson simply adds yet another text to the learners' experience," it does little or nothing to improve the effectiveness of students' listening or to address their shortcomings as listeners. Attention should be paid to what may have gone wrong during the process of listening ; however, in most texts, success in listening is being measured by correct responses to questions or tasks. If a student does not supply a correct answer, there is no indication of why that answer was not forthcoming. Did the student give the wrong answer simply because he or she made a mistake based on a few words he or she knew in the text, or because he or she did not identify all the words that were heard ?

In order to focus on listening itself, I set aside about ten minutes on a regular basis for listening practice. This practice involves the dictation of a series of short sentences which exemplify a single type of listening difficulty, for example, "assimilation" or "reduction."

2-3. Dealing with authentic materials

There are two advantages usually cited for using authentic materials for listening practice ; they provide ample examples of the hesitations, false starts, empty pauses, and offer features which characterize natural speech ; and such material is usually liked by students. Of course there are no rules without exceptions, but it is certainly true that there are some movies that are overwhelmingly popular among students. The attractiveness of movies helps to make them easier, even if they seem difficult and actually contain unfamiliar content or difficult language features for students. As Rost (1990 : 159) comments, "Listeners may extend more effort on a difficult text provided the text offers useful and informative insights." Students, however, are inevitably shocked when they move from scripted texts to authentic ones, where the speech rhythms are different, and the conversational features are unfamiliar.

There is thus a need for teachers to control their material. Teachers should be especially careful to introduce beginning students to the features of natural speech systematically. For example, playing short sections of the authentic text which contain particular features and asking students to transcribe them. Authentic materials might be compared to the basic ingredients used in cooking. You need to decide on the menu, organize materials and procedures, and cook the meal. It will take some time with preparation if you try an intensive approach with movies, and the syllabus which I will show in the next section is rather intensive and controlled. You could of course successfully teach students using films with very little language support by concentrating on general comprehension and do it in less time, and the time devoted will of course vary with the amount of attention the teacher wants to devote to the language of the film.

2-4. Model syllabus

To discuss various syllabi using films is beyond the scope of a brief paper. Instead, I will present a model syllabus, and although some readers might find it to be insufficient, I hope it can be a helpful reference to some.

(a) Choose films

First of all, you should choose one or more films for your class, then decide whether to use a whole film or to pick out scenes from the film. In my case, three short films (approximately 30 minutes each) were chosen for one textbook (or one syllabus) by the publishing company because of issues related to copyright.

(b) Divide and arrange

My colleague and I separated each movie into four units. Each unit is based on a scene about six to eight minutes long. I picked out a small clip (one or two minutes) for dictation from the dialogue for each unit. There is one specific theme for each unit. (See Appendix.)

(c) Target group/ Time period

Beginning level Japanese university students in the first or second year. The syllabus is arranged for an entire academic year.

(d) Model syllabus

Each unit will be covered in two lessons. The main listening point of each unit will be shown as follows. As I mentioned earlier, prosodic features will be introduced at an early stage. I made one listening point for each unit. For example, if the listening point of the lesson is "reduction," I picked out a clip from the video where there are several examples of reduction of speech sound.

	unit	listening point	aim
Short movie A	1	rhythm	prosody
	2	intonation	
	3	reduction (1)	change of speech sound
	4	reduction (2)	
Short movie B	5	contraction (1)	change of speech sound
	6	contraction (2)	
	7	linking (1)	
	8	linking (2)	
Short movie C	9	English vowels	difficult sounds for Japanese students
	10	English consonants	
	11	English consonants	
	12	English consonants	

I have the students watch the video for the entire unit first, then let them transcribe the excerpt from the clip. I show them the transcription later with an explanation of the reductions. It is not difficult to choose the listening point because there are numerous changes in speech sounds even in a short dialogue. Details are shown for classroom activities in Appendix.

Conclusion

This paper in no way presumes to offer a complete picture of the issues concerning the place of films in foreign language learning, and it represents a less holistic, more narrowly focused approach to films in a listening-based course. I have concluded that films appropriate for a listening class should be chosen after due consideration of the copyright, difficulty level of the film, and the captions or subtitles; also, prosodic features should be introduced in the early stage of a listening course, and authentic materials should be carefully controlled by the teacher in charge.

It is possible to justify either a whole-film approach such as found in film criticism, or a very intensive language-based approach such as shown in this article, yet there is also a more eclectic or middle ground available. If we take the content approach too uncompromisingly and treat films just as rich sources of language examples, the class would no longer succeed and the interest of the students can not be sustained.

I am convinced that most of my students are genuinely interested and involved in a listening class which uses films. I have collected comments about the class on course evaluations for the last four years, and the responses have

been overwhelmingly positive. I will continue to use films as a source of language because I believe they offer a great benefit to students. I have to admit that I do not yet have the empirical evidence to prove that my approach is absolutely right, and further discussions are certainly called for. I only hope this article will make readers consider the issues discussed here in their own teaching.

Acknowledgment

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Appendix

CHAPTER 1 GHOST TRAIN

unit 1

1. [VIDEO] First viewing. Comprehension check. True/False Quiz

- a. Grandpa is going to his son's house for the first time T/F
- b. Grandpa doesn't like the location of his son's house T/F
- c. Brian is looking forward to seeing his Grandpa T/F

2. [TAPE] Listen to the tape and fill in the blanks. (テープを聴いてブランクを埋めてください。)

Mr. Globe: Look Dad, 1 () () () () () () to all the people at the old-folks home, but if you tell Brian that, he's not going to sleep at night, see.

Mrs. Globe: He's been looking so forward to seeing you, Old-pa, it's all he talks about night and day.

Old-pa: Maybe some time soon 2 () () () () all out to the spot where it happened.

Mr. Globe: Sure, but, uh, we don't have to drive. The 3 () () () () () ().

Old-pa: Your property? Exactly where on your property?

Mrs. Globe: Here we go.

Brian: Boom Pyon Pyow! ... Old-pa? Old-pa! Old-pa! Old-pa!

Mr. Globe: Dad? 4 () () () () () ()?

Old-pa: I don't like it. No sir. Not one bit.

Mrs. Globe: Oh, Benton. Well, maybe you'll like it more once you get inside. We just finished redecorating the downstairs.

Old-pa: Oh, the house; the; the house is fine, Joline. Finest homestead I ever seen.

Mr. Globe: 5 () () () () () ()?

Old-pa: I don't like where you put it.

3. Listening のポイント

英語のリズムは強弱が重要です

どうして聴き取れないんだろう?

ブランクの部分は聴き取れましたか。答がわかると簡単なことを言っていたのに聞こえなかったということがありませんか。日常の会話はどこの国のことばでも「いい加減に」発音されます。ひとつひとつの音をはっきり発音するのはそのことばを強調したい時くらいで、普通は「できるだけ楽に、できるだけエネルギーを使わずに」発音されます。しゃべるのが早いから聴き取れないというより、音の質が変わるから聴き取れないということも多いのです。

またことばのもつリズムに慣れていないと聴き取りは難しくなります。英語を聴き取れるようになるためには、個々の音にこだわるよりもまず英語の強勢リズムに慣れることが大切です。

強勢リズムの強勢 (stress) とは単語のある部分をほかの部分より際立たせるための強いエネルギーのようなものです。具体的には声を大きくしたりピッチを高くしたり時間を長くかけたりして発音するところに強勢が置かれます。

この強勢が英文のリズムを作ります。日本語はたとえば「お・は・よ・う」のように一つ一つの音節に区切ることができますが “Good morning” はけっして「グッ・ド・モー・ニ・ン・グ」にはなりません。強勢のあるところが強いビートになって山のような感じで現れ強勢のないところは谷のような感じで現れます。カタカナで英語の音を正確に表記することはできませんが、「グッモーニン」といった雰囲気です。山は強めにはっきりと、谷は弱めに発音されます。

また強勢は比較的等間隔に現れるので弱音節が多ければその部分は圧縮されて発音が弱く早く、つまり聴き取りにくくなります。たとえば次の文をナチュラルスピードで言うと強勢が置かれるところ (●) は I と put の 2 個所なので I don't like where you 全体が速く、put it 全体がゆっくり発音されます。持続時間は I ... you と put it ができるだけ等しくなろうとする傾向があるのです。

I don't like where you put it. (p 行目)

4. (TAPE) ACTIVITY テープを聞いて強勢が置かれていると思うところに印をつけてください。
例

I wish we never left Chicago.

- 1) I designed it with three bedrooms on the second floor and one downstairs.
- 2) I just want him to show me where the Indian sites were.
- 3) I never get to play with anyone, ever.
- 4) You have your toys to play with.
- 5) Don't you ever let your father hear you say that.

5. Useful Expressions. Let's look at some useful expressions from the dialogue in Unit 1. (おぼえておきたい表現)

- (1) He's been looking so forward to seeing you (p 行目)

Meaning: あの子はあなたに会うのをとても楽しみにしています

Notes: 'so' はややフォーマルな感じでここでは強調するために使われています。

'so' は 'looking forward to (something) so' のように後置することもできます。

Related expressions:

- i) I'm really looking forward to
- ii) I'm looking forward to . . . so much
- iii) I can't wait for/to

- (2) Maybe some time soon you could drive us . . . (p 行目)

Meaning: 近いうちに車で連れていってください

Notes: 'Maybe you could (do something)' は控えめな表現で, 'Could you (do something) please' に似ています。時をあらわす表現 'some time soon' や, 'when you have the chance', 'when you have the time' など可能性をあらわす表現を伴うこともあります。また 'maybe you could' は人に要求するときのほかに 1) 人にアドバイスするとき (A: I should really lose some weight. B: Maybe you could try to get more exercise.) 2) 人を招いたり人に提案するとき (Maybe we could go to a movie some time next weekend.) にも使われます。1) の意味では try を, 2) の意味では we を伴うこともあります。

Related Expressions: 'Do you think you could.'

- (3) How do you like the house?

Meaning: 家をどう思う。

Notes: この質問には yes や no で答えるのではなく, 自分が like 以下のものに対してどう思うかを答えます。

例: A) How do you like your university?

B) It's great/terrific/wonderful

Related Expressions: How do you feel about . . . ? What do you think of . . .

'How do you like', 'How do you feel about', 'What do you think of' の3つの表現はよく混同されてしまいます。注意してください。

- (4) (So) what's wrong with it? (p 行目)

Meaning: それのどこが悪いの。

Notes: 相手の否定的な発言に対して説明を求める表現。他に So what's so bad/terrible/awful, about . . . ? So what don't you like about . . . ? などもあります。相手の肯定的な

発言に対して説明を求める場合は So what's so good/interesting/enjoyable about . . . ?
So what do you like (so much) about . . . ? など使います。

6. Application Activities : Let's practice expressions from 5-3 'How do you like . . . ?' / 'What do you think about . . . ?' / 'How do you feel about . . . ?' (以上の表現を使ってみましょう)

First, make notes about your reaction to each of the following topics. 次のトピックに関して自分がどう思うか書いてください。

soccer	heavy metal	religion	karaoke	school
your parents working	television	convenience stores		
comics	your hometown	your part-time job	marriage	

When you're finished, take turns asking your classmates with the expressions above. Add some of your own original topics. Keep the conversation going and get as many details as possible. Use expressions like 'What don't you like about . . . ' from 5-4 Expression where appropriate. (次にクラスメート同士で質問し合ってください。できるだけ詳しくお互い話し合ってください。5-4 の表現も使ってください。)

7. [VIDEO] Second Viewing. Watch the scene once more. Summarize what happens in English in the space below. (もう一度ビデオを見てこのシーンの要約を英語で書いてください。30語以内)