

Using cinema as a teaching tool in the language classroom

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The art of teaching a second language (L2) in today's demands has allowed teachers to become ever so crafty and creative. When teaching any L2 (either as a foreign language or a second language) i.e. English, Spanish or Italian (to name a few), one must make sure of two concepts: First, the motive for which the student is learning an L2; and second, the strategies and tools that a teacher may possess to attain the outcome. This conforms the aptitude that the teacher may readily possess. Furthermore, I would say that any strategy may hold its own weight, and therefore, be useful depending on how the teacher decides to implement it. In fact, I would also mention that any strategy or tool has a specific purpose, and therefore, a place in the portfolio of the teacher. Many of them may be more suitable than others, especially when considering the student's language learning goal. It is important to mention that not all learners have the same learning goals when it comes to second language acquisition, as one may do it for pleasure and/or travel, while others may do it for work, and still others for school and/or academic purposes. In the first case, the student may want to become equipped with a social aspect of the language. Cummins considers this type of language as Basic Interpersonal Conversational Skills (2010), whereas in the second case, the student may benefit from a more technical vocabulary, accompanied by a degree of social language. Finally, in the latter case, the student may want to learn the language based on having goals of becoming academically sound. In this situation, the learner's language goal may require mastery of language comprehension, especially when reading and writing.

Could there be an activity that could support these three (3) types of learners, if not all of them? Most definitely, and this article will focus on the benefits of using cinema and film to support language learning in any given L2 (and L1 inclusively). The notion of this paper will formulate why an ESL/ELD teacher or a language instructor should consider in their portfolio of strategies and tools, the usage of film to support language learning. When considered, cinema may offer the language learner the following benefits: language fluidity, language and cultural attachment, cultural awareness and fondness (including learning catchy phrases and culturally acceptable jargon), making various types of connections, and increased receptive



language skills and language comprehension; I find it to be important to distinguish between understanding and comprehension, where the former stands for being able to understand an oral message and the latter refers to being able to read a text, process it and show a high level of understanding of its meaning. Given the above-mentioned benefits, I will explain how film may be used to support language learning, as L1 but more specifically as L2.

Language fluidity

Film perfectly depicts language and how it is used in various types of dialogues. Regardless of the film at hand, the viewers may benefit from listening to discourse that uses all types of language. Given its natural form of communication, a film illustrates specific desires and ideas, by employing a precise dialogue to convey a message. Any spectator will listen, live, and acquire a message, in addition to viewing it on the big screen. I would consider this activity filled with a fabulous opportunity to listen to and subsequently live language. In fact, the pronunciation of the learner, in addition to their hearing of the appropriate pronunciation of the language, would become readily benefited by actively listening to the dialogues on the screen (Marroquín, 2015). Moreover, the repetition of the dialogue by viewing the film more than once, would also support learning the dialogue with a precise and even natural accent. This could also be evidenced as the teacher decides to incorporate specific parts of the dialogue of the movie as a way to extend the learning in the classroom. Furthermore, Antonio Vitti indicates that in many university language departments in North America, film courses are being added as a means to learning the targeted L2, not necessarily to substitute the grammar courses already being taught, but rather as a supplemental component to language learning. Additionally, he adds that many films offer a fresh real-world example of language usage (Marroquín, 2015). That is, a conversation between two senior citizens, young people, women, adults; all help support and understand (by putting language in context) a clear and concise message. I would also add that when watching a film, one is exposed to the different accents (way of speaking a language) and linguistic vocabulary, given the geographical placement point and the generation that the film represents. Therefore, one may achieve learning a language, specifically the mannerism, vocabulary, and accent that the film portrays.

Language and cultural attachment

It is important to note that language and culture go hand in hand. That is, both coexist and therefore need to be taught and learned together. Having taught second language for more than 15 years (Spanish, Italian and French as a Foreign Language, and English as a Second Language), one of the main goals in my classroom is to adorn it with specific cultural significance that displays what that country where the L2 is spoken looks like. In addition, in my ESL/ELD classroom, I would decorate my classroom with rich North American,

specifically Canadian content (pictures of nature, famous Canadians and celebrities, activities/sports, food, etc.). Furthermore, adding large photos of a trip taken, and memorabilia and souvenirs purchased, would help create a sense of being in that culture. As a matter of fact, talking about these artifacts may also increase the level of engagement with the L2 learners. A film also has this effect, as it displays specifics of a culture. For example, when it displays a monument, a statue or an iconic building, or even when it displays a significant slogan, it is a great time to pause the movie and/or make a note of it to later talk about it. I have discovered that using film to support learning culture and language, becomes beneficial, interesting, and at times, an eye-opener to many people. Keeping in mind what Louise Katainen indicated regarding this matter: “Film helps the viewers dive into the culture” (Marroquin, 2015). I would say that when a film is properly selected and used to its full potential, an educator can allow the film to recreate a mirror image of the culture, and increase the level of interest readily available through the film. Hence, a properly selected film may help L2 learners add the cultural component when learning an L2.

C'est la vie, hasta la vista..., you shall not pass, Bond, James Bond, I'll be back, I'm the king of the world, may the force be with you, you have bewitched me, body and soul, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore, are some of the movie slogans that help us remember a specific movie. Given that movies and songs offer many one-liners with specific meaning, we can use them to learn more about an L2. I have found that many students tend to repeat catchy phrases learned from a movie that they enjoyed, and after learning the meaning and how to say it, they continually repeat them with a better understanding than before.

Receptive language skills

Receptive and expressive skills are needed in order to communicate (receive and express) a message in a specific language. These two concepts are two sides of the same coin. Receptive language is categorized as the component that receives and decodes a message, whereas expressive language would be the part that produces a message (McIntyre et al., 2017). In other words, receptive language receives and understands a message while expressive language conveys a message in utterance. When watching a film, a student is aware of the message via the dialogue (either when listening to the dialogue and/or when reading the subtitles). This activity allows the learner to have a better understanding of a message. If we were to take a movie based on a novel, for example *Gone with the Wind*, a student could achieve a greater understanding of the literal message, the cultural aspect, and the political issues that divided the United States of America (the North and the South, racism, and slavery). Hence by viewing a film, an L2 learner may acquire a higher level of receptive language, which in turn allows for better, and at times, a holistic cultural and language learning. Depending on the level of the students, a teacher may be able to choose a more appropriate movie—a novel that may intrigue the curiosity of the students.

Due to acquiring a message via means of the audio-visual, a language learner may acquire visual framing, which according to Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011), the message it conveys “becomes easier to understand and easier to remember”. Furthermore, when the student views a movie, they would have a more feasible opportunity to decipher and understand a language and a cultural message. This leads to being able to make connections to further show a greater understanding. Connections such as text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world, could allow the L2 learner to show a higher degree of understanding of the language and culture.

Conclusion

There are many tools that a language instructor may choose in order to teach English as an L2 (or any other language as L2 or Foreign Language). It is important that a teacher becomes well-endowed with numerous strategies and tools that would best fit the needs of the students. Using film as a means would add yet another way to better prepare students, given its nature to engage, to marry language and culture, all while entertaining the viewers and grasping their attention. Having explored the benefits of using film in the classroom, I encourage other second language educators to not shy away from its use, but rather to think of it as a powerful tool that could compliment their already strong program.



References

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Author Bio

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