Using Films as Authentic Spoken Texts

Mika Higuchi

1.1 Introduction

In this essay, I will explore the problems when we use authentic texts in the classroom. Here I take spoken authentic texts to discuss. The reason why I do not include written authentic texts here is that at first I also tried to study about the case when literary work, for example short stories written in the target language, is used as written authentic texts. However, this attempt did not seem to work well because reading literary work does not require reading skills only, but also the sense for or sharp insight into literary work. Therefore I could not concentrate on how to develop reading skills using literary work. On the other hand, films are originally produced for entertainment, and thus usually they do not require deep insight into their contents. It means that films are easier and more suitable to be adapted into teaching materials for language skills development.

1.2 Authenticity

It seems very difficult to define what is really 'authentic'. Some would say that authentic texts are only natural everyday conversation without any transcriptions.

Some would say, on the other hand, that films, TV dramas, TV or radio news programmes, or interview shows can be included in authentic texts, because they are produced aiming to address those who understand the language as their native tongue. In my essay, I define the term 'authentic texts' as texts which are not especially produced as language teaching materials. In this sense, I will discuss the case when we use films produced and spoken in the target language as authentic spoken texts. The reason why I choose films is that they are relatively easy to adapt into teaching materials as I mentioned in the above section. In addition to this, films are rather easy to acquire, and to use them as teaching materials in classrooms we need scripts of them in order to exactly grasp the contents and meaning of each sentences. Nowadays many films' scripts are sold at book shops so that we can easily get them.

1.3 Films

As Brown (1993) mentions in his book that "technology (films, videos, televisions, audiotapes, computer software) can come to the aid of nonnative speaking teachers who are not very proficient in the second language to teach effectively"(p.246). Although I agree with his statement and think that using films in the classroom might make the lessons fun, there are not a few difficult points to make the films suit the classroom use. Any general films are not produced to build the

language learners' listening skills. This means that films cannot be teaching materials without any extra devices. Therefore teachers who are trying to use a film have to make some adaptations, which will be a hard task and I will talk about this issue in a later section.

1.4 Fluency

What we can expect the most from using films as authentic texts is that the learners will develop their fluency in listening. When we use coursebooks for listening skills, the main focus is mostly on accuracy. Accuracy is indeed a very important aspect in learning the second language. However, on the other hand, Brown (1993) points out that "fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use" (p.245). McCarthy and Carter (1995) also state that "in informal spoken data that they have collected, speakers' grammatical choice has less to do with tense in a strict sense, and more to do with modality, enabling speakers to give more emphasis to the overall content of the message than to the authority, or certainty, or the precise words with which it was uttered" (p.212). These reports show that language learners should be trained to develop fluency in listening for the sake of obtaining the ability of smooth communication in the target language. Films as authentic texts are suitable for this kind of practice because the characters are continuously sending messages to the audience or the learners; these receivers need not catch every word they are speaking, but need to understand and retain the overall content in their heads, even if several words go out of memory instantly.

1.5 Procedural knowledge

Johnson (1994) presents two types of knowledge: DK (declarative knowledge, which means knowledge about), and PK (procedural knowledge, which means knowledge how to). He says that "for tasks such as spontaneous conversation where immediate access to knowledge is required, PK is important" (p.122). It is obvious that students cannot take part in the conversations in a film; they can only watch and hear it. However, they have to understand the overall content spontaneously to follow the story. It can be seen that students are involved in pseudo-real conversation, or quoting Brown's expression, to watch and hear a film resembles being "encouraged to deal with unrehearsed situations" (1993: 245). In this respect, using authentic texts can help learners to obtain PK.

2.1 Facets of mentality and ability in language learning

When films are used as texts, it must be difficult for learners to follow because those spoken texts are so similar to real-world situations. Hence using films as authentic texts in the classroom requires of the participants both mental facets and the ability to acquire the second language at a higher level. Firstly I will consider the mental facets concerning language learning.

2.2 Motivation

There are several categories of motivation proposed by researchers. Johns (1991), who plans and

carries out a DDL (data-driven learning) approach successfully says that his way of teaching may work well for the students who are "intelligent, sophisticated, and well-motivated" (p.12). Using films in the classroom is not such a difficult task as his DDL, where he teaches "by stimulating student questions and by doing linguistic research in the classroom on a cooperative basis" (p.12). However, every sentence spoken in a film can be seen as raw data which the students have to deal with, so they are also required to have nearly the same ability as DDL students.

2.3 Ausubel's six needs

Brown quotes six needs undergirding the construct of motivation proposed by Ausubel. These needs make up motivation and motivation will lead the learners to such a desirable condition as Johns suggests. Ausubel states six needs: (1) exploration, (2) manipulation, (3) activity, (4) stimulation, (5) knowledge, and (6) ego enhancement (cited in Brown, p.152-3). When these six needs spring from students' minds, they aim for a higher level of second language competence, and then the use of authentic texts will work well. Still, it seems that few students own and feel such needs. To arouse such needs from students' minds may be one of the language teachers' most important tasks.

2.4 Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Brown (1993) cites a claim by Maslow, where he presents two types of motivations, intrinsic and extrinsic. Deci explains in detail about intrinsic motivation:

> Intrinsically motivated activities are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. People seem to engage in the activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward... Intrinsically motivated behaviours are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding consequences, namely, feeling of *competence* and *self-determination.* (cited in Brown, pp.155-6)

Brown explains about the other motivation in which "extrinsically motivated behaviours ... are carried out in anticipation of a reward from outside and beyond the self" (p.155-6). As Maslow says, intrinsic motivation is clearly superior to extrinsic. Ausubel's six needs underlie this claim. However, practically, most of the learners' motivation seems to be extrinsic because the second language is taught at schools and good ability in foreign language sometimes gives a good post in one's occupation. This is quite true in Japan.

2.5 Instrumental and integrative motivations

Brown (1993) also cites the research by Gardner and Lambert. In their research, they found two types of motivations: instrumental and integrative motivation.

> *Instrumental* motivation refers to motivation to acquire a language as means for attaining instrumental goals: furthering a career, reading technical materials, translation, and so forth.

An *integrative* motive is employed when learners wish   to integrate themselves within the
culture of the second language group, to identify themselves and become part of that society.
(cited in Brown, 1993, p.153)

Instrumental motivation is almost equal to the extrinsic one. As I mentioned in the last section,
learners in Japan mostly have those external motivations. Talking from Maslow's viewpoint, these
motivations might not lead learners to higher competence in the use of the target language. It is
again the language teachers' task to arouse students' intrinsic motivation (integrative motivation is
not always necessary because not all the learners want to immigrate to places where the target
language is spoken).

2.6   Intrinsic motivation and films

Films themselves are interesting and fun so that it can arouse students' intrinsic motivation. It
seems that films have some kind of power that enables students to deal with the target language
while apart from their academic records or professional careers. There are pseudo real-world
situations in films, with which many students wish to get more or less contact. In accordance with
this, they will come to feel the six needs that Ausubel proposed, they will want and need to
explore what they do not know, to manipulate and change the environment with the target
language, to do some activities and exercise using the target language, to be stimulated by the
target language, to process and internalise the knowledge about the target language, and to be
known and accepted by others through the target language. This procedure will lead them through
intrinsic motivation.

2.7   Facets of language ability in advance

Next, I will consider the ability in the target language before students start the class using spoken
authentic texts. As Macarthy and Carter (1995) say, in informal spoken language the sentences
are sometimes or often ungrammatical; verbs or subjects are often dropped. This is because the
conversations are "taking place before their [speakers' and hearers'] receptive eyes, a lot of
knowledge is shared, and a lot of referents can be mutually taken for granted" (p.209). This
pattern is also true of conversations in films. Although the students are watching the scene, they
are actually not involved in the conversation. They are only audience members with handicaps in
listening comprehension. They cannot share all knowledge with the characters in the film, and at
times it is hard for them to figure out the referents which should be taken for granted. In this
situation what the students have to utilise is inference or guesswork. The foundation of the
inference is the knowledge of core grammar. In other words, solid core grammar knowledge
enables students to infer the dropped or elided words that should have been in the sentence. Thus,
the students who are going to take the class using films should have mastered solid core grammar.

2.8   Listening skills

This class using films puts focus upon developing fluency in listening. Therefore the students who
are going to take this class should have acquired accuracy at a certain level. It does not require

such a high level. They should have been trained to improve accuracy in listening at a natural speed spoken in a clear voice. For the improvement of accuracy, coursebooks designed for language learners seem better than the authentic ones, such as general films, because clarity of the voice and acceptable standard English can be seen as important points in training lower intermediate students' comprehension ability in listening. Thus, using authentic texts (in this case a film) is most suitable for upper intermediate or advanced learners.

3.1　Selection of the film

In this section, I will explore the two most important points when we choose a film to study in the classroom. There are a huge number of films in the world so that it is quite hard to select the most suitable one for classroom use. The one with which the class goes should encourage students to learn authentic target language. Firstly I will consider the film's quality in terms of whether it is suitable for classroom use or not.

3.2　Property of a film

Although using authentic texts, here films, puts focus upon developing fluency in listening, as Brown points out "fluency should never be encouraged at the expense of clear, unambiguous, direct communication"(1993: 245). 'Direct communication' means in this case to understand without much trouble. There are a lot of films using too much slang, jargon, strongly accented ways of speaking, dialect, or too fast ways of talking. These films are not suitable for classroom use. Some might argue that to know slang through films is good. However, I would say that slang is in a sense vogue words which fade away quickly. If a student remembers a slang expression in a film and actually uses it later, it may sound too old-fashioned and odd. In addition to this, slang expressions seem to have a strictly limited range of use where they can be used and effectively convey the speaker's thought or feeling. Thus, it is difficult to teach slang in the classroom, even if using films. Slang can be obtained by language learners when they live in a place where the target language is spoken.

3.3　Language level criterion

Brown (1993) introduces Krashen's term, '1 i', which indicates the learners' comprehension ability. Krashen says "the language which learners are exposed to should be just far enough beyond their current competence that they can understand most of it but still be challenged to make progress. ... If an acquirer is at the stage of level 1, the input he or she receives should contain i 1" (p.280). When teachers consider the vocabulary level and the speaking style in terms of speed and clarity, speech level, language register and so on, this suggestion is very useful and practical.

3.4　The contents of the film

When teachers select a film, it is also very important to pay attention to the contents. There can

be a case in which some themes, scenes, characters, episodes, or overall atmosphere in a film might be offensive to some students.   If this happens, even though the participant has already mastered core grammar, and acquired a certain level of accuracy in listening comprehension, and is well-motivated, he or she will not make much further progress. Offended feelings or dislike towards the film prevents the participant from improving his or her skills in second language learning.   This is because films originally belong to the domain of arts so that the individual's mentality greatly influences what they watch and listen to.   Teachers should understand each participant's cultural backgrounds and other things which might be influenced by their mentality. There are a good many films which do not have such risks cited above and in which the story itself is rather easy.   In many cases it is not so difficult to know the preference of the participants in the class. In my case, the students are all Japanese girls aged from eighteen to twenty.   Talking from the viewpoint of motivation, some are quite highly-motivated, and some are not so much but are at least interested in learning authentic second language.   All of them have mastered knowledge of solid core grammar and even beyond that level.   However, their listening comprehension level is lower than their grammatical knowledge and reading skills.   Strictly speaking, their accuracy in listening is not very good.   I selected *Roman Holiday* directed by William Wyler in 1953 in the U.S. The story is easy and enjoyable for young women.   The main characters speak at a natural speed or even slower than usual quite clearly in standard English (a few supporting roles speak in Italian accented English, though).   This is a very old film, but their ways of speaking are not old-fashioned; they sound quite standard even today.   In regard to these points, this film meets Krashen's term, 'i   1', and also my proposals for participants' mentality towards the contents of the film.

4.1   Need of Adaptation

Because general films are not produced to build language learners' listening skills, there is a need of adaptation to the film.   Firstly teachers should pay attention to the length of a scene which students watch at a time.   It seems that videotapes produced as teaching materials can be good models.   I examined three videotapes which are designed to use in foreign language classrooms, and found that in these three, one episode takes three to five minutes, no longer than six minutes. This seems to mean that language learners can concentrate on listening to the target language for that duration.   Therefore, teachers should select a suitable scene considering the length and also how the scene can be utilised in teaching.   Since this class puts focus upon developing fluency in listening, scenes to be shown should be suitable for understanding the overall content.   I could find several such scenes to match to these points in *Roman Holiday*.   If the teacher is a nonnative speaker of the target language, the script of the film is necessary.   The film which the students watch should not contain subtitles either in the students' native tongues or in the target language, since even if the subtitles are in the target language, students tend to depend upon the written phrases, not upon what they are hearing.   This often happens because students at this level are much better at reading than at listening in their language skills.

4.2   Checking the students' comprehension

To check how much the students comprehend the scene is important and also difficult. Because here the main focus is upon understanding overall content, the usual dictation practice is not suitable. After watching for the first time, the teacher will ask the students about the rough outline of the scene or simple questions. For example, "Who were in the scene?", "Where were they?", "What is the name of the man?", "How did the princess introduce herself to Joe?" and so on. The questions gradually become more detailed. 'True or false' questions sound rather easy, but may be effective to check how much the students understand the overall content of the scene. On answering the questions, some students may depend on the picture in the scene, not what they heard.   However, it seems not to be a problem, because this can be seen as an example of 'language-in-action' proposed by McCarthy and Carter (1995); they say that "'language-in-action' involves participants in using language to refer to action in easy and unproblematical ways because they are taking place before their respective eyes" (p.209). If the teacher feels compelled to check the accuracy, dictation practices will be good.   Even in this case, the students should be encouraged to try to write down or repeat all the lines which a speaker said at a time. In this manner the students will come to grasp overall content even though not so perfectly, but roughly and correctly.

4.3   Illustration-Interaction-Induction

McCarthy and Carter present an approach 'Illustration-Interaction-Induction', or it is abbreviated to 3Is (1995: 217).   This approach occurs at first to supplement the traditional approach of 3Ps (Presentation-Practice-Production).   In this film-using class, the 3Is approach seems to be suitable to conduct the tasks for developing fluency in listening.   Here illustration is to watch and listen to the scenes in the film.   Questions and answers about the contents of the scenes between the teacher and the students are not only checking the comprehension of the students, but also belong to the interaction.   Although this class puts focus upon developing fluency in listening, it seems that the teacher should add practice in interaction other than listening for the sake of leading the students to the stage of induction.   Other practices should be devised in order to reinforce fluency in listening.

4.4   Congruence

McDonough and Shaw (1993) in their book quote a claim by Madsen and Bowen, which says "effective adaptation is a matter of achieving congruence"(p.83).   McDonough and Shaw also cite Stevick's term "bridging a gap" (p.83).   There must be some students who are unsure about the contents of the scenes and how much they can follow in the way they are being taught.   Therefore practice in other skills (writing, reading, and speaking) are conducted to help learners smoothly progress in fluency in listening.

4.5   Speaking

After checking how much the students comprehend the contents by questions and answers and true

or false questions, the teacher may ask some students to tell the outline of the scene. Their answers may be simplified but it is good if they tell roughly the overall content. Role-playing exercise may take place utilising the scene. Here students speak the exact words that the characters in the film spoke; therefore, the script is needed.

4.6 Writing

The teacher may ask the students to write the outline of the scene or their impressions about it. As a more advanced task, the teacher may divide the participants into small groups, and ask them to make their own skits modelling the scene, and write down the skits, then act them out in front of the class.

4.7 Reading

I mentioned previously that the teacher should select the scenes to show in the class, not showing the film all the way through. Therefore there are several episodes which the students do not know, but need to know to move on to the new scene. Here the teacher writes down a summary of unseen scenes and lets the students read them. Through this procedure the students can ascertain what they have watched and listened to so far, and also what they have missed.

5.1 Pathway of DK to PK

Generally elementary level students are taught grammar as matters of DK. Learners are taught 'knowledge about'. Johnson claims that "teaching through DK; through a process of automisation this knowledge becomes proceduralised, and so automatic that it is eventually indistinguishable in performance from knowledge internalised by that pathway [pathway of DK to PK]" (1994: 123). Here what we have to recognise is that DK is the starting point of PK. Students have assimilated knowledge about the target language by being provided grammatical items by teachers or grammar books. Through this training, learners come to proceduralise the grammatical items by themselves automatically. The final stage is to be able to perform smoothly in the target language. Internalisation is essential to develop the automatic procedure into more productive action. The goal of DK can be seen as the perfect mastering of core grammar. The participants in this film-using class can be considered to have reached this level. Therefore, they can be seen to have achieved to the level where they are able to internalise rules from what they are exposed to.

5.2 Pathway of PK to DK

There is another pathway, PK to DK. In the case of this film-using class, the students are on this pathway being directly exposed to the language, namely listening to unknown sentences in authentic spoken language. Johnson points out the danger of the pathway of PK to DK, because in this style DK will never be achieved (1994: 123). However, in the case which I have been arguing, students have mastered core grammar in the sense of DK, so that what they should try next is to acquire PK, in other words, to use their knowledge in actual language performance. Therefore the direct exposure to the authentic spoken language will stimulate their knowledge in

their

heads, and lead it to the performance, namely, fluency in listening.

5.3   Rule internalisation

Here I quote two opinions about internalisation or creation of rules by language learners. Firstly, Willis, Shortall, and Johns (1996) say as follows:

> Basically, rules are created when the language input is processed in the mind. This either involves only general problem-solving mental processes (when the learner has no linguistic knowledge with to which to compare the data) or the interaction (in the mind) of the data with some other knowledge which the learner already possesses. (p.20)

These three researchers also quote a claim by Smith in their book.

> The truth of the matter is that the learners do not take in the rule. They take in examples of the rule which they use to 'crack the code'. So they in fact create or recreate rule systems for themselves. The only thing which is internalised is raw data (input), which as the term 'raw' indicates, has to be processed by the learner and turned into mental representations, i.e., knowledge of some sort. (cited in Willis, Shortall, and Johns, p.20)

5.4   Recreation of rules

Recreation of rules seems to hold true in the case of a film-using class where the main focus is upon developing fluency in listening. The participants have the knowledge as DK, but it is still hard for them to use it actually. When they are directly exposed to the authentic language, in this case listening to the sentences spoken by the characters in the film, they try to go through the procedure of understanding the overall content. What the characters speak can be taken as 'examples of the rule', or 'raw data'. These are proceduralised in their minds and interact with the knowledge which they have obtained previously as DK. At first rules are explained by teachers or grammar books and the learners input each item into their minds; this can be seen as the first creation of the rules. However, this receptive way of creating rules cannot solidly take root in their minds; there is a need for a more productive attitude toward obtaining the rules. Thus, being exposed to the authentic spoken target language, they make great efforts to utilise the rules that they receptively obtained. There they notice seemingly new input and existing knowledge about it. By interaction between these two, they recreate the rule as solid knowledge which is able to become actual performance, in this case correctly grasping overall content. This process of recreation of rules can be seen as internalisation. Films can be a good device for stimulating students' rather frail knowledge in terms of performance.

6   Conclusion

In conclusion, I have been discussing the problems when we use authentic texts, here films, in the

classroom.   It can be said that whether this way of conducting the class will succeed or not depends on how much the students want to be exposed to authentic spoken target language, to gain communicative competence, or fluency in listening.   Even though they are so well-motivated, they should have previously acquired solid core grammar, and a lower intermediate level of accuracy in listening. In terms of the teacher's task, this is much harder than using the usual language coursebooks.   The teacher always has to think how to adapt the film to be suitable for the students.   In this task he or she should consider how the film can be utilised in order to recreate or internalise rules in students' minds.   Nevertheless, using films must be enjoyable (when the teachers pay attention to what I mentioned in section 3) for both students and teachers.   When the teachers bear in mind what I discussed in section 4, films can be very good teaching materials to develop students' fluency in listening, which will lead them to gain communicative competence of a higher level.

Note

The three videotapes I examined were *Family Album, U.S.A.* (Cooperson and Lefferts, 1991), *The Snowman* (Natsume and Natsume, 1991), and *Summer in Seattle* (Berlitz   School of Language (Japan), 1990).

References

Berlitz School of Language (Japan). 1990. *Summer in Seattle*. Tokyo: The Berlitz School of Language (Japan) Inc. and C. Itoh and Co., Ltd.

Brown, H. D. 1993. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Englewood Cliff, N. J.: Prentice Hall Regents.

Cooperson, A. and G. Lefferts. 1991. *Family Album, U.S.A*. Tokyo: Japan Broadcast Publishing Company.

Hunter, I. M. and J. Digton. 1953. *Roman Holiday*. Cine-Script Book (ed.), 1995. Tokyo: Magazine House.

Johns, T. F. 1991. Should you be Persuaded - Two Examples of Data-Driven Learning materials. In Johns and Kings (eds), *Classroom Concordancing ELR*.

Johnson, K. 1994. Teaching Declarative and Procedural Knowledge. In M. Bygate, A. Tonkyn and E. Williams(eds), *Grammar and the Language Teacher*. Hamel Hampstead: Prentice Hall.

McCarthy, M. and R. Carter. 1995. Spoken grammar: what is it and how can we teach it? *ELT Journal*, 49 (3): 207-18.

McDonough, J. and C. Shaw. 1993. *Materials and Methods in ELT*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Natsume, H. and Y. Natsume. 1991. *The Snowman*. Tokyo: Gemco Publishing Company.

Watanabe, Y., K. Soneda and L. Sanders. 1991. *From Hollywood with Love: The Only and Best Way to Get the Four Skills: Roman Holiday Love Story The Seven Year Itch. Tokyo*: New Current International Co., Ltd.

Willis, D., T. Shortall and T. Johns. 1996. *MA TEFL TESL Open Learning Programme Pedagogical Grammar*. Birmingham: The Centre for English Language Studies, the University of Birmingham.

1997 10 27