Film as a Rich Enviorontment for Language Learning

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Introduction

One problem nearly inherent in language classrooms is the absence of meaningful context. Context to support language forms usually consist of pictures, imaginary role plays, gestures, and the verbal environment of the burden of meaning resting upon the language itself. This poses problems because the learner has limited ability to comprehend the target language; this is the criteria for he or she to be in the class. The risk of language being meaningless, or mapped onto incorrect meanings, is greater when language itself bears the burden as the primary material for the construction of meaning.

The purpose of this paper is to offer film, particularly feature films as a rich environment for second language instruction. Motion pictures are consumer products which are designed to captivate the audience, convey meaning, and provide a rich, stimulating environment offering striking images, action, and characterizations. It is this environment that I propose to exploit for the construction of meaning in the second language classroom.

Content Based Instruction Approach

Film based language instruction can be considered a type of content based instruction. Content based instruction, however, is typically thought of as a means of teaching knowledge domains through a second language. Kranke offers this definition:

> It is the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teach the language itself seperately from the content being taught. (Krahnke, 1987: 65)

The type of instruction I am advocating in this paper, then, falls under this definition of content based instruction. One of the explicit goals of the class is to understand the film. The movie is the content to be understood. The language presented to the student as input is either text taken from the film itself or as additional information to assist the learner to understand the story, characters, and the movie itself.

Constructivism

Because language itself is the object of attention in second language classes, there is often an underlying bias that meaning resides primarily, even completely in the spoken or written forms. Constructivist theorists convincingly argue against this notion, offering the position that:

People construct meaning when they compose texts and when they read and hear texts, and, whether in the role of composer or comprehender (interpreter), they build their meanings on the basis of knowledge that they bring to the task and develop when performing it — knowledge that is organized (structured, configured) in some fashion. … Meaning, then, is metaphorically portrayed as a product — the product of cognitive activity performed in social acts of communication. It is portrayed more specifically as a kind of "mental representation" or a "representation of meaning" — a configuration of content that an individual generates psychologically when composing or comprehending a text. For now, a representation of meaning is conceptualized by some theorists as consisting mainly of interconnected concepts or semantic propositions although eventually it may be characterized instead in more physiological (but still metaphorical) terms, such as firing neurons. (Spivey, 1995).

The process whereby the learner constructs meaning within the instructional environment partially provided by a film involves the following sub-processes. The learner views the film and perceives visual images including scenes, actions, settings, and characters. These elements of the film evoke a conceptual assembly within the mind of the learner, attempting to understand what is going on in the story. In addition to the visual images, the learner is exposed to language, mostly

in the form of dialogue, providing additional and complementary information to construct a coherent account to understand the movie. For the second language learner, the language spoken in films is often quite difficult to comprehend in itself. The speech is rapid, idiomatic, creative, and often novel. Even when provided with a screenplay, the language is challenging. It is the non-verbal information, however, that provides a rich array of cues available for the learner to construct a coherent interpretation.

Understanding Film as a Language Learning Environment

Comprehension is, among other things, an interactive cognitive process utilizing both top-down and bottom up processes. Although the relative distinction between top-down and bottom-up can be vague (Ellis), these processes are useful to understand how people understand movies. Top-down information processing calls on higher levels of knowledge or arriving at some understanding through higher level knowledge structures. Bottom-up processing is more data driven, decoding smaller bits of information and assembling them into higher structures of meaning. It could be argued that these processes are relative and a phrase could be considered top-down in relation to a phoneme, whereas a fast-food ordering script would be top-down in relation to a phrase such as "Can I help you?"

Within the context of a language lesson based on understanding a movie, for the sake of convenience, top-down processes will refer to conceptual assembly, schema, scripts, and background knowledge. Bottom-up processes will refer to decoding any language input at the word, phrase, or sentence level.

To illustrate these processes in understanding a movie, I will use the film "A Simple Plan" as an example. The film opens with scenes of a rural farming area in the winter. A fox runs across the field and the screen is filled with the image of the face of a large, black crow. The background music is somber, almost eerie. The scene shifts to the interior of a feed store, where a man is working and filling bags of grain. The man at work narrates this scene, talking about words of wisdom imparted by his father that to be happy a man needed a "wife he loved, a decent job, and friends who liked and respected him." Then the man pauses and continues by saying, "without knowing it, I had all that. I was a happy man." The next shot in the introduction is a brief image of his wife shelving

library books and following this scene, the man walks down the street and greets several people.

The scenes assemble concepts of rural life, cold, winter, work, and marriage. The images of the man at work, his wife, and his friends provide a rich conceptual assembly for the narration. Bottom up work is required to comprehend that the man was happy once, but is no longer. Once these statements are understood, then higher knowledge structures representing human action, loss, regret, and tragedy are evoked and contribute to the construction of understanding the unfolding plot of the movie.

Compare this learning experience with one in which the teacher stands in front of the class and tells the story about a man who lived in a small town, was happy, but lost everything. There would be no images of work, a wife, or the small town. All of the burden of learning would rest upon the verbal stream of spoken words, a few phrases written on the black board, facial expressions, and gestures.

Dual Coding and Story Comprehension

It is quite natural for educators to conceptualize story comprehension as the understanding of language and the entities which it encodes. What is less clear is how language is mentally represented in the mind of the listener or reader. Dual Code Theory (DCT) (Sadosky and Paivio, 2001) assumes that human cognition consists of two systems for representing knowledge. Sadosky and Paivio argue that the reader or listener constructs mental representations of a story (or in this case, a film), utilizing two distinct cognitive systems, one for verbal constructs and the other for images. Their theory is defined as follows:

> The most basic assumption of DCT is that cognition in reading and writing consists of the activity of two separate coding systems of mental representation, one system specialized for language and one system specialized for dealing with nonverbal objects and events. Mental representations refer to internal forms of information used in memory. Coding refers to the ways the external would is captured in those internal forms. The activation of representation within and between the systems is referred to as processing.

Although Dual Coding Theory refers to literacy tasks, such as reading and writing, the theory is even more applicable to understanding and interpreting films, where the input itself takes the form of both images and language. The viewer processes images and language then integrates these forms of input to construct an understanding of the film. With this in mind, the instructor can use these two forms of input, images and language, to assist the viewer to comprehend the film, the language contained in the film, and text which can be offered to the learner to support and enhance understanding.

Working Memory Dynamics

To further understand how film provides a rich environment, I will explore the properties of working memory and its role in language comprehension. If it is true that people construct stories through images and verbal representations, then construction occurs within working memory, and is limited by the constraints of this process.

Baddeley and Logie, (1999) have proposed a model of working memory consisting of three interactive components: the phonological loop, the visuo-spatial sketch pad, and the central executive controller. The phonological loop and visuo-spatial skechpad are specialized for processing and temporarily maintaining material within their respective domains, sound and visual images. Within these components of working memory, the audio or visual image is subject to decay, but maintenance of the input traces can be maintained through rehearsal of the input. Although the role of the central executive is a matter of disagreement among reserachers, for the purpose of this paper, we will give it a broad role, including allocating attention, holding and maintaining activated long term knowledge, and integrating information through reasoning and association. Furthermore, rather than considering working memory a function of memorizing, per se, it will be viewed as a process in the service of complex cognitive activities, such as language processing, visuo-spatial thinking, reasoning, problem solving, and decision.

Understanding a film would entail the following processes:
1. The viewer percieves visual images, background music and other nonverbal cues, which are held in working memory.

2. This non-verbal information activates background knowledge which is also available for processing in working memory.

3. The viewer attends to verbal material including narration and dialogue which is held in working memory.

4. Meanings derived from verbal input is processed and maintained in working memory.

5. Cognition processes information with parallel systems, perception, background knowledge access and meaning construction occur in parallel.

6. Input occurs linearly with the viewer following and attending to a linear narrative.

In order to understand how a second language learner would comprehend language in a film environment I will discuss two examples, the first one from the film Forest Gump, the second from A Simple Plan.

Forest Gump is a story about a man who overcomes physical and mental challenges to build a fulfilling life. One of the turning points of the story occurs near the beginning of the movie when Forest is walking home from school with his friend Jenny. Forest must wear leg braces for an indeterminate length of time as treatment for having curved spine. While walking home, Forest is bullied by a group of boys who chase Forest while hurling rocks at him. Jenny calls to Forest, "Run Forest, run!" as he tries to escape his tormenters. As Forest runs, the director shows the boy running in slow motion, while playing a symphonic overture in the background. Forest runs faster and faster and soon his braces fly off and Forest outruns the bullies.

The non-verbal information in this scene is rich and tells the story effectively with little or no language required. Having viewed this scene once or twice, the characters and sequence of actions can be maintained in working memory for a considerable period of time. In order to exploit this scene for its language learning resources, text can be presented to the student which can be mapped onto the story that has been comprehended. A reading passage or dictation can be mapped onto the meanings comprehended through the visual storyline. In this example, the non-verbal information fully supports the verbal material.

The next example is from the film, A Simple Plan, a story about three men who find four million dollars in a small plane that has crashed and allow greed to

ruin their lives. In the scene where the men find the money, the main character, Hank, enters the crashed plane and discovers the pilot has been dead for some time. Another character, Lou, pulls a bag out of the plane, opens it, and discovers stacks of one hundred dollar bills. The men kneel around the bag of money for several minutes and argue about their next course of action. Hank at first wants to go to the police, but is persuaded to keep the money by Lou and Jacob, Hank's brother.

The film provides the viewer with non-verbal images clearly detailing the discovery of the dead pilot and the four million dollars. The tone of voice, facial expressions, and circumstances may lead the second language learner to hypothesize that an argument over what do with the money is taking place. For many second language learners, the film dialog is too difficult to comprehend by merely listening, even with repeated exposure. The intermediate learner may be able to comprehend a few words out of the discussion, but will not understand fully the exact nature of the argument, the sides taken, and how it is resolved.

The third example is taken from the film "One Flew over the Cukoo's Nest. This movie centers of the conflicts between a charismatic small-time criminal, McMurphy or Mac, who is faking mental illness to avoid imprisonment, and the head nurse of his ward in a psychiatric hospital. In this scene, a group of doctors and the head nurse discuss whether Mac should be returned to the prison where he was interned before being committed to the hospital. The visual information offers very little information as to the content of the dialog. Perhaps a second language learner would guess they are discussing Mac's treatment or whether to keep him in the hospital, but other than visual cues informing the viewer as to the role of the speakers and facial expressions indicating the seriousness of the discussion, no other cues are available. In this case, the language bears nearly all of the information to understand the scene, and for language learners, text needs to be provided in a form the students will be able to understand.

To fully exploit this type of scene, where the non-verbal material is rich, but cannot fully support the story, requiring understanding of the verbal input, the text needs to be presented in a way that can be understood by the students. One option is to use the screenplay. Another is to use a reading passage or a dictation. Also, a reading passage or dictation can be implemented to present a narrative for the scene, not merely the dialog spoken in the scene. Also, the dialog is high-

ly idiomatic and figurative, as is often the case in feature films, and additional text needs to be provided to make this language comprehensible.

Each of these scenes run for approximately five minutes of real time viewing. The language learning tasks that can be implemented to exploit the film extracts and construct a deep understanding of the film can require thirty minutes to one hour of instruction. Of course, since it is language that is the ultimate instructional goal and depending upon the specific nature of that goal, tasks can be devised accordingly.

Utilizing Complex Cognitive Processes

It is a common practice in second language instruction to present the learner with language, for example a word, sentence, or dialog, and attempt to make this text meaningful. This practice is one of the more peculiar aspects of language instruction, in that language is first given then a context for constructing meaning then provided. Second language learners are certainly capable of learning the meanings of words, but first language researchers suggest that this type of practice, where the word is taught to the learner, is not how children typically acquire word meanings. Bloom argues this by quoting Nelson (2002):

> Children do not try to guess what it is that the adult intends to; rather they have certain conceptions of these aspects of the world they find interesting and, in successful cases of word acquisition it is the adult [at least in Western middle-class societies] who guesses what the child is focused on and applies the appropriate work. Bloom. p. 82

Assuming this is a natural language learning mechanism, that the learner holds some conceptual representation in mind, then is given input to be mapped onto that representation; the instructional practice of presenting language first then providing meaning is the complete opposite and counter intuitive.

Making use of this natural mechanism of word learning then would entail constructing mental representations in the mind of the learner and providing input to be mapped onto these representations. Film based instruction lends itself well to exploit this language learning mechanism. Film, however, is a narrative, a particular type of cognitive process and generates in the mind of the

viewer two types of conceptual representations. One type of conceptual representation is a temporal representation of action, the other type is a theory of mind, that is, attempting to understand the actions, words, and mind of the characters in the story.

For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to this process as input mapping, that is, providing input to a learner who has generated a mental representation, which is being held in working memory and has to the potential to "fit" the given input.

Film as a rich environment for meaning construction

Film is particularly rich as an environment for meaning constructions primarily because of the visual information it provides. As the above examples illustrates, the relative contributions to meaning provided by visual information and verbal material can vary considerably, from language being nearly fully informed by visual information to language bearing most of the burden of meaning. It would be useful to distinguish forms of information provided by films and the support these forms offer to learners attempting to construct meaning from language that is not comprehended with ease or automaticity.

Salient Images

Silent movies provide a medium that consists of rich images followed by dialog or narrative commentary. For many second language learners, their experience is similar to that of the silent movie viewer, without the benefit of text screens. These images in themselves, however, provide the viewer with a rich source of information consisting of rich images which construct the movie narrative.

Certain images are quite salient, consisting of objects, faces, action, and movement. Images of walking, standing, embracing, fighting, or arguing provide non-verbal information on which language can be mapped to provide a verbal account of the story. Also, these images construct a partial narrative consisting of the visual background, music, images, faces, and actions. These images provide a structure on which language can be framed.

The following example demonstrates the richness that non-verbal movie images can provide as part of a conceptual assembly which eventually incorporates

verbal construction. The final scene in the movie, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest", contains no language but clearly and dramatically presents a coherent ending to the story. In a preceding scene the main character, McMurphy, is lobotomized after attempting to strangle the head nurse. The native American character, Chief, then smothers McMurphy with a pillow after he is returned to his room. Then Chief walks to the water fountain, lifts it off the floor, smashes it through a window, and escapes from the hospital. In the final scene, we see the chief running toward the mountains while the other patients in the hospital cheer. This scene presents images of people in action, lifting, smashing, jumping, running, and cheering, all images which easily lend themselves to language mapping. Contrast this with the same story being told by a teacher to a group of second language learners, using only gestures to provide support for the language learners struggle to comprehend.

Narrative Accounts

Narrative accounts appear early in child development and is most likely a universal human capacity. Narrative is a primary means of meaning making and the basis for story construction and comprehension. Narrative thinking and verbalization constructs actors, events, settings, actions, and goals through the lens of time. Bruner (1996) refers to this form of meaning making as the actional mode of thought and claims the following:

A second form of meaning making is concerned with relating events, utterances, acts, or whatever to the so-called arguments of action: who is the agent of what act toward what goal by what instrumentality in what setting ⋯ designed to reflect a "natural" grasp of how action is organized. (p. 96)

The narrative mode is not purely linguistic but also conceptual. Oatley (1996) argues that the narrative mode is not a description of action but a simulation of action running in the minds of readers, or in the case of film, the viewer. The film viewer, even without understanding the verbal content, constructs a mental simulation of action, a story based on the interpretation of the film images. Verbal commentary or explanation can be integrated into this already rich story construction.

It is quite natural and a matter of common sense to offer a narrative recount of a particular incident, making explicit the characters involved, the setting, the action, the outcome, and possibly explanations. Giving a narrative account of a movie scene to a group of students who have viewed the scene, but may not have completely understood it entirely is much like recounting the portion of a movie a friend might have missed if they had made a trip to the snack bar. In response to the question, "What did I miss?", we will give a summary of the scene, briefly and succinctly, including all relevant information but omitting unnecessary details.

For the second language instructor, this entails offering a brief written or oral summary following the class's viewing of a movie scene. To be most effective, the instructor needs to be aware of what non-verbal information the students were given by the film, and what was included in dialog or film narrative. A verbal account of the non-verbal aspect of the scene will give the learner a multi-modal construction of the story to be integrated with new information of the verbal aspect of the scene.

The following is an example of the final scene from "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."

McMurphy returned to his bed one night. Two hospital staff workers led him to his bed, each holding one of McMurphy's arms so that he would know where to go. McMurphy had no expression on his face and seemed not to understand what he was doing. The Chief tries to talk to McMurphy, but Mac does not answer. The Chief then discovers a scar on McMurphy's forehead, and realizes that McMurphy has been given an operation that affected his ability to understand others. The Chief takes a pillow and pushes it down on McMurphy's face, so that he cannot breath. After several moments of struggling, McMurphy stops moving and dies. The Chief believed that he was freeing McMurphy's spirit from his body, which was no longer of use. McMurphy's sprit was now free, and soon the Chief would also be free.

Narrative Inferences

Most movies tell their stories not only with a series of images but also with language, usually in the form of dialog. Thus, the story is told in which the

viewer must construct a narrative by integrating images with words. For second language learners, this can be challenging, at times even impossible. Even when language is not fully comprehended, however, the learner can rely on images, background knowledge, and inferences to construct a coherent narrative. With the knowledge of human behavior, the learner attempts to make sense of the narrative, constructing a best fit between images, language, and possible constructions of the story. Much of the time, this process is trial and error, with the learner constantly making hypotheses, and confirming, rejecting, and revising these attempts at finding the story, and perhaps not reaching a level of certainty of fully understanding the story.

Plans

Schemas, plans, and scripts (Shank and Ableson, 1977) are mental constructs that are constructed by people to make sense of and perform everyday practices. Schemas, plans, and scripts enable movie viewers to notice relevant features of the screen images and talk to construct an understanding of the character and story. For example, in the movie, "A Simple Plan", two brothers, Hank and Jacob, plot against a third accomplice, Lou, to prevent him from telling the police that Hank had killed a man. The brothers' plan involved taking the third man, Lou, out drinking, getting him drunk, have him pretend to confess to the killing, tape the false confession, then threaten to play the tape for the police if Lou informs them that Hank killed the man. This plan is revealed to the viewer in a prior scene, when Hank's wife persuades him to take this course of action. The viewer then knows that the sequence of events, beginning with sharing drinks in a bar, to playing the false taped confession to Lou, constitutes a coherent plan, where each scene and action within the scene works toward a clear goal. It is interesting to note that the goal of a sequence of scenes and actions is now always explicitly communicated to the viewer. One widely used device in the mystery genre achieves the element of confusion, later to be resolved, by having a character carry out a series of seemingly random acts, which is later to be revealed as having a definite goal.

For the language learner, schemas and scripts are highly effective tools. After having viewed a series of actions, the learner arrives at some hypothesis that they were related in some way and has a rich conceptual assembly on which

to map language. The teacher can focus on bits of dialog from the scene, and invite the learner to map that language onto the story. Also, the teacher can provide a written or oral narrative, making the series of actions explicit, the goal, and how these actions achieved or failed to achieve that goal.

The Learner's Theories of Mind

As we view a film we attempt to understand the characters. In doing so, we employ cognitive processes we use to make sense of our everyday social world. Baron-Cohen (1995) argues that normal humans posses innate abilities to hypothesis the content of the thoughts and feelings of other people. Humans are quite sensitive to facial expressions, intonation, actions, and language to determine the thoughts and feelings of their friends and family members. As we view films, we employ these same processes, constructing representations of the character's intentions and motivations and in turn, use this knowledge to judge their levels of normalcy, morality, and whether they are good or bad. These are representations which are ripe for input mapping.

Motivation

One of the most useful cognitive processes viewers employ to construct coherent stories is inferring human motivation. As we watch a story unfold we attempt to uncover reasons for a character's actions. Sometimes these reasons will be explicitly stated in the movie dialog. Second language learners who are struggling with the film dialog may not completely comprehend the language that states these underlying motivations. In either case, when motivation is clearly stated or left for the viewer to infer, the viewer possesses the ability to make inferences to connect a character's actions with a plausible explanation.

In the film, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest", the plot rests on the admission by the main character, McMurphy, that he feigns mental illness in order to avoid confinement in a harsh prison work camp. This is explicitly stated in the movie. This information, which is essential to the plot, is not clearly apparent from the images alone, and may not be fully understood by the learner without some assistance by the instructor. Elsewhere in the film, McMurphy attempts to strangle the head nurse after one of the patients attempts suicide. There is no verbal explanation for this act in the film, and the viewer must infer that

McMurphy's violence toward the nurse is caused by his anger at her involvement in the patient's suicide.

Understanding motivation and employing that understanding to construct a coherent story is part of early literacy education, literary studies, and even everyday gossip. It's place in the second language class, where film is the content of instruction, is that it is a valuable tool which helps learners comprehend language, give that language a rich interpretation, and incorporate verbal text with images to construct a story.

Causes, explanations and attributions

It is a natural reaction to attempt to understand what causes events to occur, to explain the actions of people and events and to attribute causes and explanations to agents or circumstances. Critical to understanding any story is to explain the actions of characters and their consequences. Outcomes can be attributed to one cause, or several contributing factors. Also, attributions can be derived from two sources — human agency and character or external circumstances, often integrated into a single outcome, making it difficult to distinguish the exact cause of an outcome.

Attempting to explain a dramatic outcome can be illustrated by analyzing a scene from "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest", in which the main character, McMurphy, fails to take advantage of two opportunities to escape from the mental hospital. McMurphy makes arrangements for his girlfriend to drive to the hospital at night, after the regular staff has left, and help him escape. The night before leaving, McMurphy holds a party for the patients, with alcohol and dancing, leaving McMurphy and his girlfriend drunk. Before leaving, McMurphy asks his girlfriend to have sex with one of the patients, Billy, who is a shy, lonely young man that McMurphy had befriended. While the couple makes love, McMurphy falls asleep and is found in the morning by the head nurse. During the chaos that occurs when the morning staff arrives, McMurphy unlocks the window and is ready to escape. One of the guards tells him to stop. At that moment, one of the nurses screams, the guard runs and leaves McMurphy, who is free to escape. Instead of jumping out the window, however, McMurphy follows the guard and finds his friend, Billy, who has attempted suicide.

The viewer is never explicitly informed why McMurphy did not escape.

There are several possible explanations. One explanation could be that he was simply careless, and could not successfully carry out his plan. Another explanation is that he feared he would be caught or the other patients would be punished. A third possibility is that he cared about Billy, and could not leave him alone. It is also possible to attribute the cause to external factors, that the guards prevented him from escaping and the police would have soon caught him if he tried to escape.

A second example concerns the ending of the movie, "A Simple Plan", in which Hank, the main character, throws the money into his fireplace, pushing back his wife who tries to stop him and save some of the money. There are several possible explanations for this act. One is that he is afraid he will be found out by the police, now that he has learned that some of the money's serial numbers have been recorded by the authorities. Another possible explanation is that he realized that finding the money has ruined his life; his brother has killed himself, and Hank has killed two of his friends. A third possible explanation is that he realizes that the money could not make him happy after causing him so much anguish.

These are all relevant, possible, and reasonable questions for the viewer to consider when watching this movie. It is this gap in the understanding of the story the provides a rich conceptual assembly which can be fit onto input provided by the instructor, a text, or another student.

Input in Film Based Language Instruction

Film dialog can be problematic for second language learners; it is embellished with creative language, including figurative and idiomatic language, and delivered with a fast rate of speech. Also, film language does not always complement the images presented on the screen, nor is its meaning always supported by the action and images accompanying the dialog. The following dialog is taken from the film, "Dead Poets Society." In this scene, Keating, a new teacher at a private boy's school is talking with McAllister, the Latin teacher.

McAllister: You take a big risk encouraging them to be artists, John. When they realize they're not Rembrants or Shakespeares or Picassos, they'll hate you for it.

Keating: Not artists, George, free thinkers. And I hardly pegged you as a cynic.

McAllister: A cynic! A realist! Show me the heart unfettered by foolish dreams and I'll show you a happy man.

This particular dialog includes figurative language including the phrases "pegged you as a cynic", and "heart unfettered by foolish dreams." Also, it is not transparent why the students would hate the teacher for failing to become "Rembrants or Shakespeares." The images which accompany the dialog, two teachers in a classroom, offer little to help learners comprehend the conversation.

This is not to say that the language presented in the film itself should not be exploited for instructional purposes, only that, this type of input can be difficult. Furthermore, instruction should not be limited to language provided by the film itself; teachers can provide the learners with additional texts including explanations, simplified and more direct language, and descriptions which can exploit the rich images offered in the film.

Texts for Film Based Instruction

Three types of texts for film based instruction will be discussed including narratives, dialogs, and expository texts. Narratives are useful to provide descriptions, explanations and interpretations of the movie in language within the learner's grasp. The narrative can be presented either orally or in written form. The example below is a possible narrative for the ending of the film, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," discussed above.

In the early morning, as the sun was rising, two hospital staff workers brought McMurphy back to his bed. The Chief tried to talk to McMurphy, but discovered that he could not talk, or even understand his words. The Chief discovered a scar on McMurphy's forehead and realized that he had been given an operation. McMurphy would never again be able to talk or live a normal live. The Chief then wanted to free McMurphy's spirit. The Chief took a pillow and placed it over McMurphy's face, so that he could not breath. After a few moments, McMurphy stopped moving and died. The

Chief then walked over to the water fountain, lifted it off the floor, and threw it through the window. The Chief jumped out of the window and escaped from the hospital.

It is important to note that this narrative would immediately follow the viewing of this scene. The learner is asked to integrate the narrative above with their memory of the scene the have just seen. The narrative can be presented in a variety of ways, including a written text with questions, a dictation, or a partial cloze.

Another type of text which can be given to the learner is a simplified dialog, representing a similar meaning to that which occurs in the film, but with less difficult and more direct language. The following dialog could be presented as an alternative to the more difficult one reported above from the film, "Dead Poet's Society."

McAllister: Do you think it's a good idea to tell them they can be great artists? Most of them will not become great like Shakespeare or Picasso they realize they cannot be great artists they will be disappointed. They may even blame you for their failure.

Keating: I am not asking them to become great artists. I want them to become free thinkers. I want them to have their own ideas and opinions. I thought you also had great hopes for our students.

McAllister: I have great hopes, but I am not a dreamer. I am just being realistic. People who do not have foolish dreams about their life are happy people. People who have foolish dreams will be very unhappy.

This dialog is different from the one that occurs in the film in both form and to some degree content; but the underlying idea and its relevance to the story in the movie is unchanged. This dialog is less idiomatic, more direct, including elaboration and redundancy to assist the learner to understand the meaning. One problem with understanding film dialog is that the images accompanying the dialog often gives few clues to the language content. To help learners grasp the

meaning of the story and the film dialog, the type of reconstruction presented above can be quite useful.

Expository texts can be useful to analyze and interpret films, much like film criticism. This type of text makes underlying themes and associations explicit for the learner and allows them to have a richer understanding of the film. The following is an expository text useful to help learners understand the film, "A Simple Plan."

Finding the four million dollars ruined Hank's life. Before finding the money he was content with his job, his friends, and he and his wife were happy. Without intending to be evil or bad, Hank destroyed his life and the lives of his friends and wife. He had never planned to kill anyone, but eventually was responsible for the deaths of an innocent man, his brother's best friend, and finally his own brother. Hank's wife, after losing the money, would never again be content to live an ordinary life. Money did not cause his unhappiness, if he had returned the money when he found it, he would not have lied and caused the deaths of his brother and friends. Even if Hank had been able to keep the money, he would not have been happy, because he had lost the things that gave him true happiness.

This type of expository text can be used in a number of ways including reading comprehension, or a writing or discussion prompt. It provides a useful summary of one of the underlying themes of the film and with the learner's existing understanding of the movie, can be richly integrated into the story narrative.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the instructional use of feature films has potential in the second language classroom. This paper does not argue that it is advisable to use films exclusively or completely throw out other teaching materials and methods. Films, however, offer a context that is far richer than most other materials. This richer context helps the learner construct more salient and extensive meanings for language being taught. In addition, film elicits deeply felt emotions that often do not occur in text based language activities. Also, films help construct a coherence to language classes, which is driven by the story

being told, much like the effect of literature. Film offers a language learning experience in which concepts are formed in the mind of the learner, to be mapped onto language, presented by the instruction, rather than concepts and meanings being mapped onto thinly related lists of words and sentences. Film, in short, offers a language learning tool which provides a rich environment for the construction of meaning and cognitive assistance for students struggling with a second language.

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Film as a Rich Envioronment
for Language Learning

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One problem nearly inherent in language classrooms is the absence of meaningful context. Context to support language forms usually consist of pictures, imaginary role plays, gestures, and the verbal environment with of the burden of meaning resting upon the language itself. This poses problems because the learner has limited ability to comprehend the target language; this is the criteria for he or she to be in the class. The risk of language being meaningless, or mapped onto incorrect meanings, is greater when language itself bears the burden as the primary material for the construction of meaning.

The purpose of this paper is to offer film, particularly feature films as a rich environment for second language instruction. Film provides a rich environment for meaning construction offering non-verbal information which offers considerable assistance for second language learners' comprehension of the target language. Issues discussed will include both cognitive processes of film and language comprehension and teaching practices.