

【原著】

Shared Perspectives in Filmmaking and Language Teaching

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映像制作と言語教育における共通の観点

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Introduction

The writing, shooting, and editing of a film is often a demanding, yet rewarding process. Before the final cut can be made to any project, filmmakers have many decisions to make and obstacles to overcome. Filmmakers must first think about the story that they would like to tell and how they can creatively express it in a narrative structure. Often working with many performers and technicians, clear and effective communication is essential. This collaboration includes helping the actors discover their character's motivation in a supportive environment, enabling them to deliver their most compelling performance. After the shooting is complete, the various shots and angles must be concisely assembled, so each scene supports the narrative structure. Once a rough cut is made, some filmmakers seek the feedback of peers and test audiences. Through this feedback, a stronger cut can be released for a general audience.

This process of making a film, from start to finish, has many shared experiences with language teachers when making a lesson. Task-based language teaching focuses on the use of authentic target language to complete a pragmatic task and is widely adopted by teachers, so for the purpose of this paper this approach is discussed. When making a task-based lesson, a learning outcome with real-world application must first be decided for students, followed by creating and sequencing a variety of tasks to help facilitate this outcome. During the lesson, teachers can also provide a supportive classroom environment, enabling students to gain further meaning and, hopefully, develop a deeper motivation for learning. After teaching the lesson, the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson can be shared among the teachers in a lesson feedback document. Revisions based on this feedback can be made, so a more effective lesson can be taught the following academic year.

Writing

Before filmmakers can begin to write a screenplay, they must first reflect on their own experiences and observations (Egri, 1960). They may ask themselves, "What events have I experienced in my life, and would an audience relate to it? What do I want to say with my story? Is it interesting?" From this inner dialog a screenplay with narrative structure can start to take shape. Although the narrative form is fictional, dramatized experiences that reflect the human condition tend to be the

most engaging. Narrative storytelling traditionally has the main character trying to overcome an obstacle throughout the story until he or she is successful at the end, also known as the resolution of conflict (Lehde, 2019; Rea, 2001). To make a narrative script, the story's conflict and its outcome should first be decided by the filmmaker. This can take the form of a *logline*, which is a one-sentence summary of the story and states the central conflict that confronts the main character. For example, the logline for Ingmar Bergman's 1957 film, *Wild Strawberries* (*Smultronstället*), is "After living a life marked by coldness, an aging professor is forced to confront the emptiness of his existence" (Wild Strawberries, n.d.). Once the film's logline has been written, the filmmaker can write the scenes in a cause-and-effect pattern (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001), so they lead up to the main character's confrontation of the central conflict. Each of these scenes should always convey meaning and advance the narrative until the film's resolution is achieved. Commenting on the importance of this film structure, director Vsevolod Illarionovich Pudovkin stated that "every piece, even the smallest, must have a hundred percent content if the film is to be constructed clearly and rhythmically (Pudovkin, 1970, p. 343)."

Much of the same can be said for language teachers when making a lesson. A task-based approach focuses on language as a meaning system (Willis & Willis, 2007), so language teachers should first ask themselves, "What will students want to mean?" When writing the tasks for a lesson, they may further ask, "Do the tasks relate to real-world situations, will they engage my students' interest, and do they focus on meaning?" Similar to a film's logline, teachers can then write a 'can do' statement for their lessons. A lesson 'can do' statement describes the learning outcome for students upon completing the lesson. For example, "I can express how I feel when I am sick." is a 'can do' statement used in the Bunkyo English Communication Center's General English curriculum at Hiroshima Bunkyo University. With a clearly defined learning outcome, teachers then work backwards in designing their lesson. In other words, they create the facilitating tasks and warm up activity after creating the lesson's main task (Bower et al., 2018). This allows the teachers to design tasks that focus on meaning and progressively lead to the main task. Just as each scene in a film builds toward resolution, each task in a lesson builds toward comprehension.

When writing a screenplay, the filmmaker will often include a variety of settings, characters, and actions, otherwise the viewers may lose interest from the lack of events. If an entire 90-minute film took place inside of a one-room apartment, it would quickly get boring for most audiences, just as a film with one chase scene after another would. Characters with contrasting personalities interacting in different locations can help keep things interesting for the viewers as the story unfolds. For example, in the 1952 film *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* (お茶漬けの味) by director Yasujiro Ozu, different settings are used based on the topics being discussed by the main characters; finances are discussed at home, social issues are shared at a restaurant, and disillusionment is expressed at a bar (Schrader, 2018).

As a lesson unfolds, language teachers can also make use of variety in the classroom to maintain their students' interest (Brown, 2001). A lesson can have varied task types, such as sorting, comparing, predicting, discussing, presenting, and problem-solving, with opportunities for

students to use the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Additionally, students can perform these tasks in various classroom arrangements: individually, in pairs, in small groups, or as a whole class (Gebhard, 2009). Having variety also allows teachers to experiment in their classrooms, so they can discover which kinds of tasks are well-received by their students (Ellis, 2014).

Meaning

During the production of a film, it is common for directors to shoot multiple takes of their actors' performances. This allows the actors to become more comfortable while in character, which can help them discover additional meaning in their actions and emotions. Ultimately, the process of shooting multiple takes with a supportive director can lead to a more authentic and nuanced performance from an actor. Director Paul Schrader recognized this during the production of his 1978 film *Blue Collar*; "Harvey [Keitel] would work on the meaning of a scene in the early takes and then after ten takes he'd be terrific" (Jackson, 1990, p. 145).

This approach also applies to language teaching. If students are experiencing high levels of anxiety in a lesson it will inhibit their interactions with their teacher and classmates. The repetition of activities in a classroom will create opportunities for students to improve and gain confidence (Gebhard, 2009; Willis & Willis, 2007). After finishing the repeated activity, teachers can point out the strengths of their students' performance without focusing on the shortcomings, so they can gain a sense of achievement, just as a director may give some supportive feedback to an actor after concluding a series of challenging takes. "When we consistently and sincerely work at trying to understand students' meaning without expressing verbal or nonverbal judgement of the language used, a positive, trusting relationship between the student and teacher can develop, one that also reduces anxiety about being in a language classroom" (Gebhard, 2009, p. 74). Linguist Stephen Krashen and filmmaker Stanley Kubrick would both agree on the importance of creating an anxiety-free environment for optimal performance. According to Krashen's *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, successful acquisition of a second language is related to a student's emotional state. Language students with an elevated filter are unable to receive comprehensible input, because they are anxious and lack the confidence and motivation to learn (Gass & Selinker, 2001). During the production of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Kubrick also commented on the outcome of these emotional factors in the context of a film set. "What you really want is [your actor] to feel confident and enjoy what he is doing, otherwise he is not going to be able to do it very well" (Castle, 2005).

Sequencing, Pacing, and Timing

After capturing the performances, the filmmakers will assemble the scenes from different camera shots, angles, and movements, so they communicate meaning and continuity, also described as the *visual grammar* (Knapp, 2003). As the film starts to take shape during the editing process, the filmmaker must consider its sequencing, pacing, and timing, and how each assembled scene will contribute to the overall storytelling of the narrative. Scenes must be sequenced in an order, so

the conflict experienced early on by the main character progressively leads toward the film's conclusion. Without this structure, unnecessary dialog, characters, and scenes can creep into the storytelling, resulting in a film that lacks focus and appears to have nothing to say to its viewers. The pacing of a scene is equally important. If a scene shares too much information at once, the viewers will become lost, and if it pointlessly drags on, they will lose interest. Pacing also considers how well each scene transitions into the next. Finally, based on the intended audience of the project, the time limit is another consideration for the filmmaker to make. Short films entered in film festivals are typically less than 30 minutes, episodic TV shows tend to be 30 to 60 minutes, and feature-length films for theatrical release are usually 90 minutes or longer. Projects with unwieldy edits or too much content may need some drastic cuts, so it can adhere to its time constraints. In an extreme example of this, director Michael Cimino initially delivered a 325-minute cut of *Heaven's Gate* (1980) to the studio executives at United Artists (Bach, 1985). With a length too long for theatrical release, the executives insisted that it be heavily edited; a 219-minute cut was subsequently released, followed by an incoherent 149-minute cut.

Sequencing, pacing, and timing are also considerations for language teachers when they are making a lesson. Teachers can introduce the lesson's topic in a warm up activity, followed by a vocabulary-building task (Gebhard, 2009) and position the easier tasks at the beginning of the lesson. As the difficulty increases, the teachers are able to maintain comprehension by sequencing facilitating tasks in a logical order, thereby preparing the students to successfully complete the main task near the end of the lesson (Brown, 2001). Once the main task is completed, students practice using the grammatical functions that they have encountered throughout the lesson in the *focus on form* section (Ellis, 2014). By focusing on the grammar at the end of the task sequence, students have more context for its usage, so they can make greater sense of it. It also highlights the language that they will likely encounter in future lessons. Finally, it can be motivating. Students who were struggling to express meaning throughout the lesson will become more receptive to learning the language form at the end of the lesson (Willis & Willis, 2007). Teachers also consider the pacing when making lessons, so students have an adequate amount of time on each task. As with a scene in a film, if a task is too short and rushed, meaning may not be clearly communicated and create some confusion, and a task that never seems to end will ultimately create disinterest. Additionally, the tasks can have transitions, so they smoothly flow into each other (Brown, 2001). Finally, teachers should have each of their tasks appropriately timed. This will allow them to plan an adequate number of facilitating tasks, so their students can successfully complete the main task within the lesson's allotted time. Providing estimated times for each task in the lesson's teacher notes, can help teachers be mindful of the limited time they have with their students. Otherwise, tasks may need to be modified, rearranged, or cut.

Feedback

Once a rough cut of a film has been made, filmmakers may seek the feedback of a test audience, so they can gauge the reaction of a general audience. After watching a rough cut, the test audience members fill out a questionnaire to express their likes and dislikes, as well their suggestions for

improvement. From this feedback, filmmakers may gain some insight, resulting in additional edits to their rough cut. To strengthen the narrative storytelling, these edits could include changing the scene sequence, removing unnecessary characters, adding additional scenes, or trimming lengthy shots. Take Martin Scorsese's 1990 film *Goodfellas*, for example. The test audience negatively reacted to the excessive violence and the length of the final act, which prompted Scorsese to trim some of the more gruesome sequences and use a series of *jump cuts* to speed up the narrative (Hess, 2017). These changes didn't compromise Scorsese's original vision. In fact, they strengthen the narrative for the jump cuts reflected the manic behavior of the main character during his downfall. In addition to the test audience questionnaires, filmmakers can gain further insight from observing the audience members in the theater during the screening of the rough cut. This observation can reveal their interest level to a specific scene or the film as a whole, which may lead to additional edits to the film. Feedback is not always welcomed by directors, especially if the suggestions are financially motivated. For example, a studio executive may want a shorter running time to increase the number theatrical screenings per day (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001). Generally speaking, though, feedback is a valued process for most filmmakers, regardless of their experience. As stated by Walter Murch (2001), editor of *The Godfather* (1972) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), test audiences are "helpful as a corrective... to point out blind spots that may have developed through over-familiarity with the material" (p. 52).

Same as making a film, putting a lesson together can be a long and exhaustive process, so having a fresh set of eyes look at it can help point out these blind spots that come from over-familiarity. Through feedback, lessons can be revised, so they are more teachable and engaging (Bower et al., 2017). Just as a film test audience provides feedback after a screening, teachers can express their experiences with the lesson soon after it is taught. In a shared document among the teachers, they can express what did and did not work well and share their ideas for improvement. Like the scenes of a film that must progressively lead towards the film's resolution, perhaps the facilitating tasks do not prepare the students enough for achieving the lesson's goal, so they need to be edited. This could mean the pacing or difficulty level needs to be adjusted, a task that bridges meaning is added, or the task sequence is reordered. Teachers can be further informed by simply observing their students' interest level throughout the lesson. Once the lesson feedback is gathered and reviewed, necessary updates can be made for the following academic year by a revisions committee.

Closing Thoughts

The parallels that can be drawn between producing a film and making a language lesson are considerable and go beyond the ones discussed in this paper. There are many details that must come together in the writing and producing of a film and the writing and teaching of a lesson. Each stage often presents a new set of unforeseen challenges, so it is helpful to be creative, flexible, and positive throughout the process. To make one final comparison between these two fields, it is important that both filmmakers and teachers remain passionate during the process – simply going through the motions will not inspire viewers or students. A passionate filmmaker

shows in the theater, just as a passionate teacher shows in the classroom.

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