

Moving Ahead with DVDs and the Web

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Information technology is on fast-forward in the Asian Tiger economies, and our students are avid consumers. Devices such as DVDs offer high quality images and sound; relevant for language learning are the subtitling options in English and L1 as well as the extra material (additional sound tracks, interviews, etc.) often found. These features are more conveniently utilized with DVDs, which can even be played on some notebook computers. On the other hand, some students clamor for more courses to improve their English, little realizing that the toys they use every day can help them work on language skills on their own.

Films are entertaining in addition to being a rich source of language. Because different genres appeal to different people, they have more motivational impact with self-study. However, students need training in how to use the linguistic options offered by DVDs, and they may not be able to get this assistance by taking a class. Therefore, we decided to set up a website to aid students in how to use DVD films in English to improve their English skills. Beginning with one film, *You've Got Mail*, we give general advice and provide specific activities students can do with each chapter. This paper presents the rationale behind this project and a summary of what we have done so far.

Every day we hear about the Internet, digital technology, and the like. Professionals as well as students here in East Asia are quite proficient in the use of these new tools and communication systems. Witness all the mobile phone users walking along our city streets. Users tend to be younger, better educated, and living in urban areas. Nevertheless, we are told that in order to get ahead, to succeed in almost any profession, we will all need to be proficient in the use of information technology, young and old, rural and urban alike. How is all this to be accomplished?

Most would agree we have to start with the young. Those nearing retirement today can easily survive without IT skills if they have not had need for them in their working lives, though we have heard of senior citizens using the Internet for all sorts of useful purposes. However, children seem to pick up the workings of new devices without the trepidation their parents have. They will be the IT users of the future.

But then a problem arises. While more well-off or professional families may have computers and other IT devices at home for children to learn on, what about the other children without computers at home? Who will teach them? Their teachers, of course. However, there may be another problem here. Teachers are older than their students and may fear computers and other such devices. More often than not, teachers are female, and many may feel that machines are a male area of expertise. They may even be confounded by language labs, which, unfortunately for them, are becoming more and more sophisticated. Yet operating such devices does not require the raw physical strength more abundant in males, just the pushing of a few buttons, the adjusting of some settings, and a general understanding of concepts of input and output. Notice, too, that when we call in a computer expert to solve some problem, such experts are almost always male.

This brings us to teacher training. Older teachers adverse to technology will retire soon. Some younger in-service teachers may appreciate and benefit from training in the use of technological devices in teaching their particular subjects. Yet we can most easily concentrate on the training of pre-service teachers. For example, I teach a course Audiovisual Methods for an M.A. program for teaching English in Taiwan. My most recent class had eight students (seven out of a class of ten because one was from another program)—seven females and one male. As part of the course requirements, they had to teach a 40 – 50 minute practice lesson using one or more of the audiovisual devices (audiotape, videotape, DVD, opaque projector, PowerPoint, CD-ROM). These lessons were videotaped, and students had to watch their lessons and critique themselves in their final paper. One of the questions they had to answer was “What did I learn from this activity?” Following are some of the comments.

Linda: “...the first thing I did was to look for the videocassettes I could use. I went back to the school where I taught before and discussed with my colleagues. One teacher told me there were lots of videocassettes available in the library. I taught English in that school for three years and I didn’t use those resources in the library during those three years. In fact, few English teachers in the school use those ready-make ELT videocassettes in their teaching. Because of this assignment, I get the chance to know that there are lots of resources which are available and be used as the teaching aid. I tell myself after I go back to teach English, I will make good use of those videocassettes.” “Because I am poor at drawing, there are no drawings in the previous handouts I made. For this assignment, I learn how to use the scanner to help me put beautiful pictures on the handouts. Thus in the future, I believe I will be bale to make more beautiful and appealing handouts with the help of the scanner.”

Rachel: “By preparing the teaching materials, I get to know more about NTHU’s AV center. Though I’ve been there several times, I didn’t really know what it served before. But now I know how to find what I need and I know where and how to watch-/hear those AV materials.” “This is my first time being videotaped, it’s somewhat embarrassed but funny to see myself on the television. It’s really a good chance to take a close look at myself standing in front of a group of students as a ‘teacher’. Fortunately, I didn’t find too many improper gestures or stupid facial expressions! By the way, I also learn the skill of videotaping students while they do some kind of oral presentation. It’s a great way for them to monitor themselves via videotape and see what needs to be improved.”

Flora: “...I used the search engine to look for teaching materials; I found that the Internet really abounds in rich information for teaching. For example, I got two reading texts pertaining to my topic for my students in Session II. Besides I accidentally found there are many interesting websites for my topic [Halloween] and their art clips are just perfect for my activity handouts. When I got art clips from the Internet, I learned how to use photo-editing system to tailor them to proper size for my handouts. Honestly speaking, I am definitely not a computer wizard. However, the process of preparing for the lesson, I practically tried using photo editing system and PowerPoint, and finally I realize that making the best use of computer can really make things better and easier.” “First, emerging yourself in all kinds of genre on the TV or videos can bring about the unexpected teaching materials.”

Joyce: “...so I turned to the film *Bird Cage* in that the scene is full of messages about gestures and the gay issue, a controversy which might be able to arouse students. Deciding the contents of the material was the hardest part since the film is not made for teaching; however, it was this part that I learned most. I tried hard to imagine activities that might arouse students’ interest and fit in with their current levels. Of course, I am not so sure that all the activities will be suitable for their levels; some might be too difficult or uninteresting, but the process of creating material was fun, too. Whenever an idea occurred to me, I felt

delighted. I also tried to browse through some books for inspiration, and when I finally finished all the contexts, I felt a sense of achievement.”

Selina: “I spent four hours to figure out that only the ‘IBM compatible’ computer could work with the OHP [digital projector] in our school. I was told that some types of OHP can work only with ‘IBM compatible’ computers. So, I learned that if I want to use a computer to present in the future, I’d better to check if it is IBM compatible at first.”

Cecilia: “I realized that it is necessary for teachers to compile and accumulate useful materials in daily life. It is too late if one starts looking for information just before teaching. Also, there exist a wide range of materials on the Internet but it takes time to screen and tailor the material for classroom use.”

Austin: “...we should be always prepared. That is, we have to make sure the availability and usability of the equipment in advance. We also need to have a “substitute lesson plan” because technology is naughty, sometimes playing dead game in your class.”

Our MA in TEFL program also includes an optional course in Computer Assisted Language Learning. Thus with these courses we hope our students will go out to their teaching jobs unafraid to embrace and use technology where it suits their teaching needs.

In this paper I report on a project that incorporates DVD films and the Internet for student self-access learning and practicing of English language skills; a summary of the project was also presented to the students in the AV Methods course. The aim of the project is to provide a website that students/people in Taiwan can access for advice and activities on how to watch/use specific DVD films to improve their English language skills. While the project is aimed at Taiwan’s secondary students, and while there will later be some Chinese language on the site, most of the site and directions are in English and can be used by non-Chinese speakers. Moreover, the site also provides activities and suggestions for teachers who wish to use the films in a teacher-fronted classroom situation. Thus it is hoped that the website will also be used by in-service teachers to guide them in using DVD films in their EFL classes.

This project is part of a much larger project called *Advanced Technologies and Applications for Next Generation Information Communication Networks*, which is part of the Program for Promoting Academic Excellence of Universities, January 1, 2000 to December 31, 2003. The project directors are Wen-Tsuen Chen, National Tsing Hua University, Chung Laung Liu, National Tsing Hua University, and Wen-Hsiang Tsai, National Chiao Tung University. The following is from the English text of the goals of the project:

- Networking has changed our daily life and become an essential part of it.
- Many new applications and technologies emerge in recent years, such as Internet telephony, video conferencing, video-on-demand, telemedicine, distance learning, digital library and electronic commerce.
- Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement in Internet capacity, technologies and applications. The key to success in this emerging new era lies in technology innovation and integration in every aspect of communications and computer networking.
- This project proposes to develop technologies and applications for next-generation information communication networks, with a purpose of carrying related research into international excellence in the next decade and readies our society for the information new era.
- This project consists of nine sub-projects. Six of them are executed in the National Tsing Hua University and the other three are in the National Chiao Tung University.

Sub-project 6 is entitled *A Web-based Educational Park*; its major supervisors are Prof. Yi-Long Huang, History, NTHU and Prof. Chung Laung Liu, CS, NTHU. Its objectives lie in

- Implementing the capabilities of the internet in education, investigating the impact that the internet will be bringing upon to societies and life-long learning and presenting the possible way to adapt to this technological innovation in education. The establishment of a large virtual Educational Park promoting the rationale of life-long education.
- The investigation of the potential issues and new social problems in the information society.

Advantages of Using Video for English Learning

There are a number of reasons for using video in the classroom (see Katchen, 1996, for a more detailed discussion on the advantages of using video). First of all, we get language input for listening practice; video is superior to tape recordings because students can more easily distinguish among more than two voices, the speakers are more “real” and not disembodied voices, and often seeing the mouth movements is an aid to comprehension. Even though films and TV shows are scripted, we still find language as it is naturally used. Situations show grammar in context. Teachers can call attention to nuances of change in intonation as well as how contractions and elisions are naturally used. Students are often trained with full forms and have difficulty understanding elided forms in fast speech. On a higher level, the way language is used—the pragmatics and sociolinguistic norms—may be illustrated quite clearly and naturally in films. Ritual speech—thanking, apologizing, leave-taking—these can be pointed out as they occur.

A second reason for using video is as a stimulus, a way to elicit language output for speaking or writing activities. The content can present ideas that motivate students to express their own ideas. The focus of these reactions could be from the various cultural elements embedded in films. In addition to unique cultural artifacts specific to a culture, other ordinary things, such as the arrangement and utensils of a kitchen, may differ in various parts of the world. Nonverbal behavior—gestures, eye contact, proxemics—all can be a source of cultural difference. As is often said, “A picture is worth a thousand words.”

A third possibility is to use video to aid in teaching content. I teach a course called Varieties of English, and to me video is indispensable in providing examples of Englishes from all over the world. Documentaries may be used to supplement topics we teach. Teachers of literature use film versions of great literature, and increasingly media literacy is becoming popular, a course useful at a time when we are bombarded by so many media messages daily.

Finally, films and videos are colorful and appealing. Watching a film doesn’t feel like work; it feels like fun. We watch TV to relax, so using a film/video in class lets students put down the books and learn in a less typical way. Moreover, the story line is motivating, pulling us to watch the story to find out what will happen next and how it will end.

Tips for Using Video in Class

When we use videos in class, it’s usually best not to show a whole movie in a class period. Even proficient users of a second/foreign language may have difficulty paying attention for two hours, lose the thread of the story, thereby losing interest and falling asleep in the darkened room. It is usually more productive to use shorter clips, ideally one to three

minutes, so that students can watch more than once and with a purpose. For example, we can give students two or three general comprehension questions and watch a scene the first time, watch again to check the answers (especially if there was some difficulty or controversy about the answers), then watch again for some more specific information or to do some linguistic activity (such as providing a partial text and having students filling in the rest). Finally, we can play again for a review. We can use shorter clips, such as commercials or news stories, or segment films into several scenes/sessions. If our school has a self-access lab, we can use one or two scenes of a film in class and let students watch the rest of the film on their own time in the lab if they so desire. Going beyond this, we can require students to use self-access on their own time and provide activities for their use. This project is aimed in this direction in that it provides activities for students to work with on their own. . (For a list of video activities, a good starting point is Stempleski and Tomalin, 1990.)

Students in Taiwan respond well when video is incorporated in lessons. Chiang (1997) used a laser disc of *Beauty and the Beast* with Reading/Writing classes and also with her Listening/Speaking classes. Fox (1999; 2000) has used various films and TV programmes successfully with university students for general English. My own extensive experience using video with university English majors shows that they respond well and appreciate the use of unique material; many have said that after my Advanced Listening course, they feel more confident watching English TV programs and films without subtitles.

Issues in Using DVDs

The Digital Versatile Disc or Digital Video Disc has many advantages over the traditional VHS format. Because they can store far more information, sound and picture quality are much higher. Most DVDs are made with a lot of extra information, for example, subtitles/captions in several languages, sometimes two or more extra sound tracks, and added video material, such as interviews with the actors. People buy DVD players because of the quality, but for language learners the added subtitles are of even greater interest because they allow the learner to read in English what the actors are saying and also to read in the L1 (first language). We teachers can also make use of the added interviews or other material.

Although some documentaries and other materials are available on DVD, most consumers buy movies to watch and enjoy. Many of the first films produced in DVD were action films that showed the special effects DVD could reproduce; these types of films do not appeal to all audiences and they tend to have little spoken language. However, more recently, all types of films are being digitized, including the older classics, so the choice is much broader and can appeal to all tastes. However, we should be careful if a DVD film sells too cheaply; that may be an indication that the film is pirated, and it may not contain all the features (subtitles, segmentation into chapters, extra material) of the authentic DVD.

Making English learning activities for a whole film is not new. Wood (1992), with the agreement of Sony Japan, produced textbook activities for one semester each for the films *Kramer vs Kramer* and *The Karate Kid*. Mejia and O'Conner (1994) produced a book of activities for part of five famous films, and several books providing activities for other films by the same and other authors have appeared. Teachers have shared their activities with specific films through barter exchanges of the TESOL Video Interest Section. Indeed, it is common for teachers to use clips of films in classes for various purposes; showing a whole film is more problematic because of time constraints and possible student boredom with using the same film over several weeks.

It should be noted that DVDs are not the same throughout the world; there are six world standards. DVDs made for one region do not necessarily play in another region unless one has a player that plays all regions. Taiwan is in Region 3, and DVDs made for this

region usually have subtitles (if the film is in English) in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Thai, and Korean. DVDs are quite strongly copyright-protected, but this can be overridden (for example, to copy stills or clips or to download captions) by a caption decoder, in particular combined with a computer interface (Lin, 2000).

While DVD players allow us to move to different “chapters” of a film (a two-hour film is separated into roughly 30 chapters for quick access) very quickly and to change captions, different players/remotes have different features, making the equipment somewhat more difficult to learn and use, especially for a teacher using different classrooms and equipment. Moreover, finding a specific spot is more difficult than with the older LD player and, unlike old videos that could be cued to the right spot ahead of class, whenever you insert a new DVD, you may have to wait 30 to 60 seconds for the required start-up (Tatsuki, 2000; personal experience). The numerous menu functions can be quite daunting, in particular for teachers not too comfortable with using equipment in front of large classes.

Making classroom activities for DVDs is essentially the same as for ordinary videos (for example, Andreotti, 2000), though the teacher can make more use of the English subtitles because she does not have to transcribe them herself. Varying viewing with L2, L1, or no subtitles is also more convenient.

Advantage of Using DVDs with Self-Access

In Taiwan, DVDs are popular with students; they can even watch them in their notebooks computers if they have DVD drives—and some do. The best part is the multilingual captions/subtitles. Ordinary videotapes require bulky caption decoders in order to see the closed captions in English, but DVDs do not as the captions are built in to the DVD and the reader into the player. When we are dealing with self-access, students determine the type of film they want to view as well as when they want to repeat a scene. In this respect, self-access provides an advantage over a teacher-fronted class.

In a traditional self-access lab, the video materials are available to be watched there; the assignments/activities may be in folders or may have been given to students previously in class. The difference in this project is that the Internet is the source of the assignments; the “lab” is the user’s own home with his own hardware and software.

Which Films to Use?

If we are going to use a film for intensive language practice by students, then what kind of film should we choose? There are a few considerations. First, the teacher should like it. Most of us teachers would probably agree that we teach better when we like the lesson or topic we are teaching. If we are going to spend a lot of time working with a film, it is better if we ourselves enjoy the film.

We need also to consider the students. If a class is made up of both males and females, then the film should appeal to both. When we look at the list of films available on DVD or even VCD, we notice there tends to be an emphasis on action films or those that use special effects. Action films tend to appeal more to males and may turn off females. However, romantic love stories may turn off the males. We need to strike some sort of balance. Really good films tend to appeal to both genders.

Language is an important consideration. Generally speaking, the materials should have up-to-date, colloquial language. Note that action films often have less language: few people talk during chase and fight scenes. This is not necessarily a bad point; action scenes can be used as a stimulus for language output, as mentioned above. That is, students can

summarize what is happening. Lower level students can benefit, too, because they can follow the story without understanding too much language.

Films come in all ratings, and we would not want to offend students with the film's content or language. This can be quite sensitive in some cultural contexts, but normally we know our students and their backgrounds and usually know what would and would not offend. Yet even an otherwise inoffensive film may contain some vulgar language. While we may not want to teach the terms for active student use, we can tell students it may be useful to know such terms for passive knowledge. For example (especially for students planning to study in English-speaking countries), if they hear someone use the term in front of them or to them, they need to know the pragmatics of the situation and how to react.

Another approach with vulgar language is to look at it sociolinguistically (Gareis, et al.). Ask students to talk about what is considered vulgar or taboo in their native language or culture, and who uses vulgar language in what situations. Compare with English speaking cultures, where terms for sex and excretion may be vulgar and where derogatory terms about religion are taboo; where vulgar language often reflects anger or scorn, and where, as with many cultures, it is more "acceptable" for males to use vulgar language. Students, with the teacher, analyze the situation or context in which vulgar language is used and then try to rewrite the text with the language of a more "polite" character. Thus, by changing the focus to analysis of language use, we teachers can take the sting out of vulgar language.

Let us now look at some popular films and see how well they meet the criteria of the EFL teacher. When I first saw it, I fell in love with *Shakespeare in Love*, an academy award-winning film. It is certainly very well made and the story is appealing: it's a great love story! Premarital sex is obvious though not offensively portrayed. The language is British English (not American, if that is relevant), but it is an older style of English, Shakespearean and poetic. The premise of the film is that the heroine is Shakespeare's inspiration for writing *Romeo and Juliet*. Thus, to really appreciate the film, one should be familiar with the play. Indeed, the DVD has an audio track specifically devoted to the specific points of reference between the film and the play. Such features may be useful to the university English major specifically interested in English literature, but I fear using *Shakespeare in Love* with other students may be too challenging.

You've Got Mail appeals to both males and females, as it is a love story from both male and female perspectives. Students will recognize the famous actors—Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks. The language is modern and colloquial American English. Even though the setting is New York City, language is relatively standard. The story reflects modern life and students' lives, e.g., computer-literate people, meeting potential dates on the Internet. However, premarital sex is implied as each of the main characters is shown living with another person of the opposite sex. Beyond the previous caution, the film is a good choice for secondary students and older and it is used in this project.

The Wizard of Oz is an old film, yet it is included in the project because it is such a part of Americana. The language is colloquial American English of the 1930s, but the expressions from the film have become American idioms and metaphors: Follow the Yellow Brick Road; Ding Dong the Witch is Dead; You're not in Kansas anymore, Dorothy; The Tin Man; and even Oz. I was amused to find that at our university in Taiwan, all students are given the mailbox code OZ. Moreover, the topic—Dorothy getting lost in a tornado and having to use her wits to find her own way home—may appeal to younger viewers, as it is a metaphor for growing up.

Types of Activities

Not all video activities that can be used in a classroom are appropriate for self-access because students' cannot so readily interact with the teacher. In this respect, adjustments in activities and provision for interaction will be made, and the differences necessitated noted. The following activity types should work in a self-study context:

- Find background on another website
- Language activities
 - Fill-in the blanks, parts of dialogues
 - Prediction
- Vocabulary/other uses
- Look at nonverbal
- Points of culture
- Think about and react to
- Focus on captions and translations
- Notice how the film is made
- Use materials from other tracks, e.g., interviews)

Suggest Strategies

In recent years it has been recognized that not all students learn in the same way (see, for example, Wendon & Rubin, 1987). There may be many routes to learning particular material. Generally speaking, good learners use more ways, or strategies, to learn, whereas poorer learners tend to use fewer strategies. That is, it could be said that the successful learner is successful because s/he has more strategies at his/her disposal, so that when one way does not work, s/he tries another.

Successful English learners often study on their own and discover creative ways of learning; one physicist with no formal training in English perfected his English by reading and re-reading Agatha Christie novels! These students do not require a teacher's help, but most others do. I have seen university students express some surprise when shown that they could use a video player to rewind and watch a news story again—and understand more. There are many more techniques and strategies students could use, but they need to be shown.

Not all students can take another course to expand their English or their use of learning strategies; perhaps a course appropriate to their needs is not available. Older students, those who are already mature professionals, may not have time for formal courses but may prefer to study independently. However, if they are not sure how to plan their own curriculum, the Internet can help. The Internet can function as a self-access learning center that provides learning activities and guidance.

The following general strategies are recommended at appropriate places on the website:

- Watch chapter by chapter
- Watch first with L1 subtitles
- Watch with English captions
- Watch without captions
- Watch silently with English captions
- Read along with film for pace, stress, and intonation

DIFFICULTIES AND LIMITATIONS

There are two important limitations to the project. The most serious one is copyright. Each film carries a warning against any public showing whatsoever, even educational, though the showing of some parts of films in classrooms is permitted under the laws of some countries. Nevertheless, putting any video clips from a copyrighted film on a private website would be problematic. Therefore, in order to avoid this problem, the project will be set up with the assumption that the user has his/her own access to a legal copy of the DVD film. The website will rather give instructions to users, such as “In Chapter 3, you will hear one of the characters say XXX. What does this phrase usually mean? Does it have the same meaning here? How do you know?” Discussion about content of film is legitimate on a website. Not including any clips of the films would avoid another problem—the bandwidth needed to support Internet video. However, without clips, another way to make the website look attractive is with still shots (within copyright limitations). Older films may have fewer copyright restrictions, but these may also be less attractive and potential users of the planned website would be less likely to purchase old films than to purchase popular new films.

The immediate task is to fill out the activities for the first film, *You've Got Mail* in order to try them out with university students in self-access and get their feedback on appropriateness, design, and so on. As the project's aim is to assist students in learning/perfecting English skills, naturally, the activities will be in English; however, the directions and suggestions should be in both English and Chinese for those who are already struggling with English. Moreover, although the initial focus was to be self-access use for students, it would seem useful to include a teacher's component with advice on how to use/adapt the lessons for teacher-fronted classroom use.

Another area to consider is feedback to and from users. With many of the language activities, students can check their own work against the English text of the DVD, and for content the Chinese subtitles may answer some of their questions. With other activities, they will need to/want to check with a teacher or discuss their answers with others. Will there be a teacher available on-line? Or will students work on the film as an assignment from their teachers and check their work with them? Another difficulty to overcome will be how to track users and how they are using the site. We hope to address these problems in the second to third year of the project.

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Websites of ELT Video Organizations

- TESOL Video Interest Section, <http://iac.snow.edu/faculty/dogden/vis>
- JALT Video N-SIG, http://members.tripod.com/~jalt_video/
- IATEFL Media SIG, <http://www.iatefl.org/mediasig/media1.htm>