

# **'READING' FILMS AND 'WATCHING' LITERARY TEXTS: 5 LESSON PLANS FOR ADVANCED TEFL STUDENTS**

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This paper justifies the use of literary works and their filmed version, offering an extended lesson plan using five combinations of films and books for upper-intermediate and advanced students. In the first part we argue in favour of using both modes (the visual and written ones) for improving students' general level of proficiency. The two codes constitute authentic sources of comprehensible input, increase students' learning time outside the classroom and provide a linguistic and paralinguistic context that supplies a relevant schema background for understanding language. Moreover, their comparison also allows for a critical analysis. In the second part 5 lesson plans to carry out throughout the course is provided, combining books and their filmed version. For every book and visual adaptation previous, while and follow-up reading and viewing activities are proposed, integrating the four skills and promoting negotiation.

Annual Index: film, TEFL, TESOL, literature

## **1. Introduction**

'After many years of discredit because of the stress on communication as the main goal in learning a language, literature has made a grand comeback on the stage of language teaching...playing an essential role in TEFL' Bouman (1991:15) Literature is, in fact, an ideal form of communication, and has the power to create a whole reality through the written code chosen by the writer. This medium has another advantage: it allows autonomous learning, as students can increase their contact with the second language outside the classroom by reading (I hope, for pleasure). Perhaps the only drawback of literary works is that they do not allow for immediate interaction: the reader cannot establish a process of negotiation of meaning with the writer, and he/she cannot listen to those written words. A way to compensate for this lack of aural input is to combine literary works with their filmed versions, as we are using the written medium –literature- and the visual and aural one –films- for teaching the second language. In this paper we will show several proposals on how to exploit a unit of work which deals with modern literary works and their filmed versions, but first, let me play the devil's advocate and argue against combining both modes of expression for teaching, and later justify their use.

## **2. Difficulties Arising from Trying to Combine Literary Works and their Filmed Versions**

We could start by arguing against this type of combination. Many people strongly dislike watching a movie after having read the book, perhaps because the imaginary world depicted by the writer and imagined –or rather, visualised- by the reader does not coincide with the version as seen by the film-maker or director (Ellis, 1990). The typical comment of those daring enough to take the

risk of viewing a film they have already 'read' is that '*the film was not as good as the book*'. The power of the written code is such that it can create a mental image in the mind of the reader that cannot compete with its visual adaptation, a finished product as seen by its director, although the world of the mind when reading has no limits of space, time, or resources.

To the problem of the dislike some people show when watching a film after having read the book, a second problem could be considered: when combining both modes, the difficulty arises of trying to depict, through images, words that suggest figures of speech, or archaic registers, or peculiar combinations, or even descriptions of imaginary words that many computer designers would be at pains to adapt. Nevertheless, the latter is not a problem anymore, as film technology is progressing at full speed.

A third problem could arise if learners, usually more inclined towards video than print as a source of information and stimulation, presuppose the filmed version may be a means of saving time and effort not to read the literary work. Even though the movie provides a wider visual and aural background through the use of paralinguistic features (Wood, 1999), the written text is a unique source of linguistic input.

### **3. Rationale: So Then, Why Use Literature Works and their Filmed Version?**

Both literary works and films are authentic materials<sup>i</sup> that can be exploited in and outside the classroom, motivating the students to work with two codes which also have a great value as a source of entertainment. Films, in particular, constitute a stimulating and appealing activity in our everyday life, and books should also be part of it. If they do not, watching the film may stimulate the students' interest in reading the written version.

Both films and books are very good sources of comprehensible input, which in turn is essential –though not sufficient- to promote acquisition (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991; Ellis, 1994). Specifically, movies are highly recommended input sources for teaching listening and speaking skills outside an English speaking environment: for example the foreign language classroom, where the only English students hear is that of their teacher or classmates. Literary works complement the type of input provided, and also offer the opportunity of extending input reception beyond the classroom allocated time. The use of both 'tools' can be justified by many of the theories that explain L2 acquisition,<sup>ii</sup> particularly if we combine viewing or reading with communication-based activities with a focus on some grammatical point (Ortega, 2000).

Learning, as we have said, consists of something else beyond understanding comprehensible input, and in this sense the two modes offer a pathway for acquisition, as they make frequent use of what we term 'formulaic language' (Weinert, 1995; Luque Agulló, 2002). These linguistic chunks, which are listened or read by students within a meaningful context, can later be recalled through rote learning. That is to say, they may be memorized, stored and later remembered and used by the prospective listener-reader when the situation demands its use, either because of processing restrictions (Skehan, 1998) or as a result of an automatization of the cognitive demands involved in producing a language (DeKeyser, 2001). Thus, it is not only comprehensible input that students receive, but also *correct* linguistic models -although that depends on the type of film or book- they can memorize and use.

Moreover, both films and books have the potential to create a very wide linguistic and extralinguistic context that provides a relevant schema background, making language relevant and comprehensible (Stoller, 1988). For example, in the written mode we can see not only isolated words and sentences, but also discourse and textual elements such as reference, deixis, time and place clauses. They might offer difficulties for the students' comprehension, but with the help of the linguistic context students may be able to understand or infer unknown words and structures, or even acquire – incidentally- some specific vocabulary (Watanabe, 1997). On the other hand, the paralinguistic features of the filmed version allow learners to see and understand how discourse elements link all the parts of the text, specially with the use of images, music, movement, and the like. These contextual cues enrich or at least improve the students' comprehension, and probably can also improve their competence, and even though the realisation of both modes is obviously different, they still constitute part of a context for comprehension and, hopefully, learning.

Furthermore, if students are familiarised with the story line of the book or film, they can concentrate their efforts on the linguistic features (Hemphill, Picardi and Tager-Flushbert, 1991). In particular, we can take advantage of the universality of mass media (Mandler, Scribner, Cole and DeForest, 1980) both to develop cultural awareness and foster an interest in reading -for pleasure- the written version of that story they have seen on TV or in their classroom.

Also, the comparison of both modes can evoke a critical analysis: how the film-maker conveys metaphors and descriptions, figures of speech...in short, how he makes it possible to 'see' rather than to 'read' (Ross, 1991). And most important of all, how the director makes it possible to spend one hour and a half 'watching' a story that has taken many long hours, and days, or even weeks, to read.

#### **4. Why our Specific Choice?**

The selection of 'modern' books included here could be considered by some people as a little peculiar; in fact not many literature teachers would include them in a University syllabus. They constitute very unrepresentative examples of classical English language, and even some people would classify them as 'popular literature', with all the pejorative meaning of the term included.

Nevertheless, we think it more advisable to choose books which use current English; it is better for our purpose –that of improving students' competence- and also they are closer to the students' interests, which in turn make it easier for them to learn. Besides, their filmed version are easily accessible, either because they have a fashionable topic (i.e. *Interview with the Vampire*) or because they form part of a series of filmed versions of the same story (i.e. *Dracula*, *A Yankee in King Arthur's Court*). There is still another reason for our choice: the world depicted in the written works and their adaptation should not be too far removed from the students' current reality, or if it is, at least it should show some degree of connection with their culture and background knowledge (and the culture/s we want them to learn). That is the case of two of our examples: *Dracula* and *A Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. In the former case, the topic has become very fashionable nowadays. In the latter, we thought about the advantages of Twain's American sense of humour, very similar to the Spanish one and different from the English humour depicted in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Besides, our students should not show any lack of background knowledge on the Arthurian topic, given the number of written and filmed

versions of this popular myth. The choice of *A Clockwork Orange* is a more personal one. We are assuming our students have a good working knowledge of English, sufficient to work with a code different from the target language (the 'talk' used in both the book and the film). It also requires a certain age, at least late adolescence, to understand and not be affected by the violence depicted in the plot. (This planning should only be carried out if the teacher believes the benefits will exceed the problems that might arise).

## 5. Objectives of our Planning

The themes and topics presented here may seem very different from each other, but our main aim was

*To improve the communicative and linguistic competence of our students through the study of different modes (films versus literary works), genres (descriptions, narratives, criticisms), and themes (love, humour, terror and vampire myths) extending learning time outside the classroom and carrying out the adaptation of authentic materials by designing previous, while and follow up viewing and reading activities. The four skills will be practised, but more classroom time will be devoted to the oral skills -listening and speaking-.<sup>iii</sup> Some attitudinal aspects will be included (see planning 6.1.) together with American and English cultural aspects (see plannings 6.3. and 6.5.).*

It is important to mention that these activities are designed for upper-intermediate or advanced students not younger than seventeen. They were designed having in mind prospective teachers in their third year, as they already know about learning and conditioning techniques (to view *a Clockwork Orange*), most of them might have gone to England already (and understand the cultural aspects in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*) and hopefully they may probably know about Arthurian myths (to connect them with *a Yankee in King Arthur's Court*). Third and Fourth course philology students can also be another type of potential audience, as, even without so much knowledge about learning and conditioning, they might know more about literature, having read different registers and genres (and thus be able to understand and connect *Interview with the Vampire* or *Dracula* with the romantic period).

In connection with timing, around three one-hour sessions will be devoted to each planning, although students are expected to devote some extra time to reading the different books and carrying out other activities, such as research projects on different aspects, compositions, etc. *A Clockwork Orange* will probably take longer (around four classroom sessions), whereas *Four Weddings and a Funeral* may take only two sessions, provided they have viewed the film before.

### A). *A Clockwork Orange*

These activities are designed for students with some knowledge of behaviourist techniques, as the film and book show a very strong criticism of these procedures that assume learning is the product or response of appropriate stimuli. Specifically, two main objectives are to be achieved here:

i. In connection with the learning techniques depicted and criticised in the film, we want our students to become aware of the implications of conductist techniques for teaching, their advantages and disadvantages, and to develop a personal opinion on the topic for their future teaching careers.

ii. In connection with the registers used in the book and the film, students should be able to identify and understand these specific 'languages' and how they are able to represent a particular reality, context, and even way of life.

Activities:

1. First, as a sort of 'warm -up' to introduce the main underlying topic of both the book and the film, there will be a brainstorming on behaviourism. This will be a whole class activity.

*What do you know about Skinner? How were the techniques first implemented?*

*What is the difference between classical and operant conditioning? What is the use of these techniques in the school?*

2. Second, and after reading the book, there will be a debate about *Violence in the school. Were we as violent as current children are now?*

The class will be divided into two groups, each adopting a role in the debate.

Individually at home, the students will have prepared also a written composition on the topic. We will also comment on 'Ludovico's technique: Fiction or Fact' (pages 79-82/ min 1.21 in film), as the conceptual connection between behavioural techniques and violence (or rather, lack of violence) is very strong in both works.

3. Third, after having discussed the main topic in general terms, we will concentrate on the first chapter of the book (pages 5 to 14) and the first image of the film, and how the two modes are able to represent a similar reality. Students in pairs will compare both of them and look for differences and similarities (i.e. dress, image of gang, pub, face of narrator...etc).

4. Fourth, we will study the main character, (where he is described in the book), its personality, likes and dislikes and see how the film 'reflects' those characteristics. This activity will be carried out in groups of three. The conclusions will in turn be shared with the rest of the groups.

5. Fifth, as an individual activity, students will look for parts in the book where music is used or mentioned (i.e. page 29), and compare them with the music on the screen. Results will be then contrasted with other students' opinions.

*What is your impression? Has the music and its written description got the same significance?*

6. Sixth, after reading the sixth and seventh chapters of the book (the last ones), students will give their opinion on the book and the film's final messages.

*Are the final messages of book and film different? Why?*

7. Seventh and last, students will look at how language is used, its features, how it differs from normal English word order and how lexical words are created or transformed (underlining them in the written text and signalling them in the filmed version). After this, and using the written and visual context, they should be able to give a lexical equivalent in standard or even formal English. The activity will be done in pairs, but afterwards some key passages will be commented by the whole classroom.

*Is the language of the book also present in the film? In which way is it different?*

## **B). Interview with the vampire. Vampire Chronicles.**

Our main purpose here is to deal with the processes of description, of getting to know a character through the written word and through his actions or words in a film. We will also try to analyse how the same figure -Lestat- is presented and considered in the film and the book. (In this case very differently).

1. First, students watch the whole film, and immediately afterwards the teacher elicits adjectives that students associate to the movie. Then the same process will be carried out with the main character of Lestalt. This will be a whole-class activity.

2. Second, each student has to write a description of the main character as depicted on the film. In a follow-up session, compositions will be compared and common elements (i.e. descriptive adjectives) summarised in a chart. Students should carry out this activity in groups.

3. Third, as an individual activity, students will read the first chapter of the Book (pages 13 to 20) and compare the above description to the written one. What are the differences? Students will discuss them in pairs.

4. Fourth, students look for descriptions of New Orleans in the book and in the film and analyse similarities and differences. The activity will be carried out in groups of three, while a secretary writes down a summary of the conclusions, which will then shared with the rest of the class.

*What do they prefer, the written word or the visual image?*

5. Fifth, each student should write a summary of the film. Afterwards they read the introductory words of Lestalt (his memories: pages 1 to 8) and analyse the different interpretations: film and book through the main character narration.

*Do they convey the same message? In what sense?*

6. As a follow-up activity students can choose any book of Ann Rice and study the atmosphere she conveys in her books and the sensuality of the characters she created. This activity is intended as a written follow-up project.

### **C). *Four Weddings and a Funeral.***

This time we will only use the film and a written transcription of several scenes. Our main aim is to study English humour and how it is developed through language.

1. First, as a warm-up, the whole class revises vocabulary related to weddings with a brainstorming session. Then the teacher explains (if necessary) what the movie is about.

2. Second, the teacher asks where the story is going to take place and how the students know who the main character is by looking at the first scenes. Again, this should be a whole-class activity.

3. Third, we will concentrate on the 'scene of the rings' from minute 6 to 9. The students see it without sound, though it is easy to see what is happening.

*What is happening? What do you think they are saying?*

Stopping the film, and assigning the three roles of the characters in the selected scene to the students (groups of three), they write down the dialogue - what they think they are saying-, and 'dub' the characters. Later on they see the scene with words, compare it with their lines and vote for the best dubbing.

4. Fourth, the students watch the interaction<sup>iv</sup> between the 'priest-to-be' and a girl, Fiona, also without sound, and guess -in pairs- about what is happening.

*What is the priest like? Is he embarrassed? What is the girl like? What can they be telling to each other?*

5. Fifth, we will study word formation. The scene to be used starts at minute 28 and ends at minute 31. The students see the scene, <sup>v</sup> and then they are given its transcription. Individually, they are to underline the word 'skulk' in all its forms, then look at the different forms and assign them to the different parts of discourse (V, N, Adj.). Finally they try to guess the meaning of 'skulk'. Students now look for the meaning of the word in a dictionary. Afterwards, and in pairs, they may make up a dialogue with another 'unknown' word so that the rest of the students find out its meaning.

6. Sixth, the second wedding<sup>vi</sup> will be analysed as an example of how intonation can create humour in British English. Students are required to underline stressed words, mark falling or raising intonation and see the overall effect.

*What is achieved through stress and intonation?*

#### **D). *Dracula***

1. Probably many of the students have a general knowledge of the story, so the first thing we will do is to write down the facts. This activity can be done either in pairs or individually, depending on the type of students.

2. Then they will read the introduction of the book and see if they can find any mentioned sources of the original story.

3. As a project out of classroom, different groups will also look for different 'dracula' films, and afterwards they will be 'summarised' and contrasted with the rest of the films obtained, and then compared with the facts of the original written version. Coppola's version has been considered the most 'faithful' one, but still, many elements are different, such as: the narrator's point of view, order of presentation of facts, Lucy's behaviour and Mina and Young Dracula's relationship.

4. It may be very interesting to compare -step by step- the book with the film, as many dialogues are exactly the same, and some descriptions are followed in detail. In contrast, some parts are faster or slower, summarised or recreated and extended, and even sometimes 'disordered'. Thus students in groups will study these facts, and try to analyse the reasons for these changes. Different groups will be able to notice different things, so results should be then shared with the rest of the classroom. The final question they should answer is:

*What is the message, the impression, the feeling you get from each work? How is this achieved?*

#### **E) *A Yankee in King Arthur's Court***

Several topics and aims will be covered with this book and film, such as the figure of Mark Twain, his work and his epoch, a revision of part of the Celtic mythology (Merlin, Morgana...), and we will also study a different kind of humour (not as the one introduced in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*) and criticism (different from the extreme one in *A Clockwork Orange*).

1. Two previous activities will be carried out: one group of students investigates the figure of Mark Twain, his age and work, and another group does some research on Celtic mythology. Their results will be commented on in the classroom.

2. Second, as an individual activity, they will be asked to select parts of the book in which the main characters are described, and compare them with what they see in the film.

*Are those characters as you thought they were going to be?*

3. Third, following the main features of Mark Twain as a writer, the students –in pairs- analyse some selected texts and how these features are presented in the film.

4. Fourth, taking into account that the book is full of drawings and strange writings,

*How are they represented in the film? Have they got the same meaning?*

This should be a whole-class activity.

5. Fifth, Twain was famous for his humorous language. Individually, students select phrases or parts of the book with this feature and analyse how it is written. Then they answer the question:

*Did the director achieve this effect also?*

6. Sixth, the whole class will answer this question: *What is the significance of the ending of the book and in what way is it different from the film? Which did you enjoy more?*

## 6. Conclusions

This extended (or combination of five) lesson plan(s) is intended for upper-intermediate or advance adult students, preferably studying to become Primary or Secondary teachers, to be done as an integrated activity throughout the whole academic course. There is a number of reasons for this: First, such audience would be able to watch and read *A Orange Clock*, for example, and understand part of the message involved in both modes. Second, they would also be able to perceive and benefit from the specific linguistic features of some of the films and books selected (i.e. *The Orange Clock*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *A Yankee*...) and establish comparisons among them. Third, students of this type should have enough practice at reading *-and enjoying-* unabridged books, an essential task before carrying out each lesson plan. Fifth, this type of audience would probably be able to understand some of the aspects of the British humour depicted in *Four Weddings* and also the American humour appearing in *A Yankee*<sup>vii</sup>. Sixth, the competence level of the proposed students would ensure that these activities are a source of comprehensible input (Krahen, 1985); they provide opportunities for negotiated output (White, 1987; Ortega, 2000); a model of formulaic language to be later recalled (Weinert, 1995), and an opportunity for focus-on-form practice and incidental acquisition of vocabulary (Ellis and He, 1999; Doughty, 2001). Last but not least, they are very enjoyable activities.

### Books

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Rice, Anne (1993) *The Tale of the Body Thief*. Vol. IV. *Vampire Chronicles*. London: Penguin.

Stoker, Bran (1983) *Dracula*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Twain, Mark (1953) *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. New York: Perennial Classic.

### Films

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Ford Coppola, Francis (dir.) (1993) *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. (Duration 128 minutes)

Jordan, Neil (1994) *Interview with the Vampire*. Vampire Chronicles.

Newel, Mark (1994) *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. (Duration 120 minutes)

Damsky, Mel (1989) *A Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. (Duration 92 minutes)

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## **Appendix 1: Transcription of first scene in 'four weddings and a funeral'**

*'My name's Fiona'*

*'I'm Gerard'*

*'What do you do?'*

*'I'm training to be a priest'*

*'Good Lord. Do you do Weddings?'*

*'No, no, not yet. I will though, of course, jolly nerve-racking.'*

*'Yes, rather like the first time one has sex.'*

*'Well, I suppose so.'*

*'Though rather less messy, of course, and far less call for condoms.'*

## Appendix 2: Transcription of second scene in 'four weddings and a funeral'

'Hi'

- 'Hello'

'Sorry about that'

- 'No, that's fine. He was hard to get rid of'.

'Yeah. So... maybe we could just skulk around here for a bit and then... go back down'

- 'Now, that's a thought. I don't usually skulk a lot but but I suppose I could skulk if skulking were required. Do you skulk regularly?'

'No. No, I don't normally think of myself as a skulker but...'

- 'Well, why don't you come in and skulk for a while, and we'll see'.

### Appendix 3: Transcription of third scene in 'four weddings and a funeral'

Min. 34:

Charles: *'Sorry I'm late. Traffic'. Who is it today?'*

Min. 37:

Priest: *'In the name of the father, and of the Son... and of the Holy Spirit Amen'*

All: *'Amen'.*

P: *'Let us pray. Father, you have made the bond of marriage a holy mystery. A symbol of Christ love for his Church. Hear our prayers for Bernard and Lydia, through your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Goat. Ghost, one God forever and ever, Amen.'*

Friends: *'it's his first time. He's a friend of the family'*

Charles: *'Excellent'.*

P: *'Bernard and Lydia, I shall now ask if you freely undertake the obligations of marriage. Bernard, repeat after me. I do solemnly declare...'*

Bernard: *'I do solemnly declare.'*

P: *'That I know not of any lawful impediment...'*

B: *' That I know not of any lawful impediment...'*

P: *' why I, Lydia...'*

B: *'Why I, BERNARD...'*

P: *'Sorry. Why I, Bernard Godfrey Saint John Delaney...'*

B: *'Why I, Bernard GEOFFREY ST JOHN Delaney...'*

P: *'May not be joined in matrimony to Lydia John Hibbot...'*

B: *' May not be joined in matrimony to Lydia JANE HIBBOT...'*

P: *'Lydia, repeat after me. I do solemnly declare...'*

Lydia: *'I do solemnly declare...'*

P: *'that I know not of any lawful impediment...'*

L: *>That I know not of any lawful impediment...'*

P: *'Why I, Lydia Jane Hibbot...'*

L: *'Why I, Lydia Jane Hibbot...'*

P: *'May not be johned in matrimony...'*

L: *'May not be JOINED in matrimony...'*

P: *'To Bernard Geoffrey Sijjjern Delaney...'*

L: *'To Bernard Geoffrey St John Delaney...'*

P: *'I call upon those persons here present to witness...'*

B: *'I call upon those persons here present to witness...'*

P: *'That I, Bernard..... Delaney...'*

B: *'That I, Bernard Delaney...'*

P: *'do take thee, Lydia Jane Hibbot...'*

B: *'do take thee, Lydia Jane Hibbot...'*

P: *'to be my awful wedded wife'*

B: *'to be my LAWFUL wedded wife'*

P: *'that's right, that's right. May almighty God bless you all, the Father, the Son and the holy Spiggot ...Spirit'.*

All: *'Amen'.*

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<sup>i</sup> The choice of authentic materials is, in itself, a very motivating tool for students. In fact, literary works are particularly appealing to adult students if the topics are carefully chosen (Uemichi, 1988).

<sup>ii</sup> For example, that of *Comprehensible Input* (Krashen, 1985).

<sup>iii</sup> In this way we double the time devoted to English: they read at home, at their own pace, they complete most written activities at home, also having the possibility of reviewing and correcting their work, and classroom time is left for practising the aural skills.

<sup>iv</sup> In Appendix 1

<sup>v</sup> In Appendix 2

<sup>vi</sup> In Appendix 3

<sup>vii</sup> I have carried out some activities connected to humour with first year Philology students, second year prospective teachers and upper-intermediate intensive courses for adult education, and, with the exception of the last group, which needed some help, all the students seemed to enjoy the activity a lot.