Increasing EFL Student Oral Production Motivation through Adaptation of Popular Film Programs to Task Based Teaching

Steven Burke

Introduction

For an array of often complex reasons, many Japanese college students seem to lack motivation to improve their English. (McVeigh 2001p. 29; Berwick and Ross 1989: 206). From my experience, of the four skills students are trying to improve, the most difficult one to motivate students to use is that of oral production. One possible reason for this motivational vacuum is due to the limitations of most textbooks in use. Despite the best intentions or skills of the materials writers, authentic English that students can genuinely relate to, is rare. Within the confines of a classroom, it is a challenge to create a need for student relevant, real-life language. One possible alternative, the use of film, can create this need. The combination of people using authentic English in an interesting context on film can present language more comprehensively and realistically than any other teaching medium (Stempleski, S. & Tomalin, B, 1990). Once presented however, students need to use and react to the language used in the film format. Studies in the field of second language acquisition have led to claims (Rooney, 1998; Long & Crookes, 1993) that where one uses language is less relevant for language learning than what one uses it for, e. g. a task. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how appropriately chosen popular programs adapted to Task Based Teaching (TBT) (Willis, J. 1996) can lead to increased student motivation in studying English.

Choosing the Program and Motivation

Choosing the appropriate program for students to watch is central to motivating students. Before discussing what factors might go into choosing a film, it is appropriate to talk about what might motivate Japanese students. As Ellis (1994:517) points out, "motivation in second language (L2) learning constitutes one of the most fully researched areas of individual differences," and numerous studies have provided evidence that indicates motivation is an important indicator of foreign language learning success. The bulk of motivation research in SLA has focused on the distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation (Gardner 1985), the former arising from a desire to integrate with the target language (TL) community and the latter from material rewards associated with FL learning success. Judging by reports that show Japanese households having huge savings (Japan Times,

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May 11, 2003）; it seems unlikely that instrumental motivation would be a major factor. Regarding the role of integrative motivation, there doesn't appear to be an abundant number of Japanese who have more that a cosmetic desire to integrate with any English speaking country. Superficial motivation among students in my classes seems to be the most prevalent. In fact, the times many of my students emerge from of their somnambulist state is when conversation topics turn to areas of fashion, music, movie stars or movies.

The Problem －What Students Want

According to Chambers (1999: 37), '[I]f the teacher is to motivate pupils to learn, then relevance has to be the red thread permeating activities'. Whenever possible, I use material from *students'* "real world". Students naturally find authentic world material related to their lives much more interesting and stimulating than edited and controlled "student world" exposure. The use of newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, radio, TV, movies, etc. has proven for my classes to be an excellent way to bring the real world into the classroom. These forms of media also provide chances to expose students to cultural aspects of the language which further help the language take on "character" and make it more genuine.

What I found to be most "real" and appealing to students is the use of movies and TV programs. The goal has been to find programs that students are interested in, but also contain what teachers want: EFL friendly with substance. Choosing a film or program at random and showing it without assessing whether it meets students' needs is a recipe for demotivation among many Japanese students.

I do not advocate pandering to student's lowest common denominator of interest; instead, I look for material with student-relevant material but also contain substantive themes. Depending on students' level, I seek films that touch on universal and ageless topics affecting young people such as: developing autonomy, facing conflict, establishing intimacy, resisting peer pressure, cross-cultural understanding, and ethno-centricity.

I experimented with many films to find out what students were interested in. From films and TV episodes I selected and showed over the last two years, I always kept a log of student reactions and project completion rates for each film, and I gave a short, simple questionnaire at the end of each semester. I have approximately, 200 female students' responses to the written survey. Although not a large number it did provide insights as to which direction to take in future film selection. The questions were open-ended to have students recall facts about the program.

Program Survey

1. **What was your favorite scene in the film?**
   映画の中で、気に入ったシーンは何でしたか？

2. **What was your least favorite scene in the film?**
   映画の中で、あまり気に入らなかったシーンは何でしたか？

3. **Who was your favorite character in the film?**
   映画の中で、一番好きな登場人物は誰でしたか？

4. **Who was your least favorite character in the film?**
   映画の中で、あまり好きではない登場人物は誰でしたか？

5. **Did you like this film? Why or Why not?**
   この映画が気に入りましたか？気に入った理由と、気に入らなかった理由は何ですか？

I showed a variety of films and popular American situational comedies. The most successful programs were: Ferris Bueller's Day off, Malcolm in the Middle, Blast From the Past, Foot Loose, Clueless, Titus, and King of the Hill. Each programs received nearly 100% approval for question #5. Additionally, for questions 1-4, there was an 80% fill-in rate; in other films students left the same questions blank. I showed other films or programs but did not include them here because I considered them "duds" due to low student response. (such films however, could become motivators in the hands of other instructors).

The responses to the questions were not surprising; students tended to like what average native speakers liked. Overwhelmingly, for question #1, the most popular response had something to do with a young person involved in some sort of romance. A close second, usually had something to do with a young person's clever way out of an adult induced problem. In third place, it was usually something to do with simple comedy. For question # 2, there were no significant clusters of any similar responses. For questions #3 & #4, the film writer's designated main characters matched those chosen by students. Question #5 was the most telling of the questions. It was here that I got an over-all impression of how well students liked and understood the program and whether to show it again, and if so, in what form. The most popular programs were: *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (movie) *and* the TV series: *Malcolm in the Middle* (MITM). I tend to use movies for end of semester projects and series for end of unit tasks. For this paper I will describe how I used MITM. I found it ideal to use because for three reasons: first, each program is short and wraps up in 20 minutes; second, each episode usually covers an interesting theme that can be discussed according to student's ability; and three, students almost always relate to and laugh at MITM.

What is *Malcolm in the Middle* (MITM) and Why is it motivating?

In the USA MITM would be called a "sitcom" (situational comedy) but the term 'sitcom' doesn't do this program justice. This is more of a weekly mini-movie than the typical US comedy series

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- complete with the moronic jokes and appreciative laugh tracks. On paper it sounds like other network junk: Mom, Dad, and four sons argue, struggle and scream throughout various stages of adolescence. Suburban sitcom hell, right? Not this time, this show is brilliantly funny; *Malcolm in the Middle* has been honored with a Peabody Award and Emmys for directing and writing.

The majority of my Japanese students likes, and relate to, the main character, Malcolm, the best. Though none of my students, that I know of, have genius IQs like Malcolm, they seem to see things in Malcolm's life and family that are familiar to them: a controlling mother; a loving but ineffectual father; an elder brother who is the proud black sheep of the clan; a middle brother who is a slow-yet-dangerous bully and delinquent savant; and finally a younger brother, Dewey, who a little goofy and weird.　　As Malcolm observes at a point in one episode, "This family may be rude, loud and gross, and have no shame whatsoever, but with them you know where you stand. " Interestingly, many Japanese students have, in casual, out-of-class discussions, repeated similar feelings to me about their own families!

Japanese students in my classes seemed to relate to many of the situations that happen during the show. A lot of the situational action takes place in malls, stifling classrooms and schools. Japanese students can gain insights into the "real" or the "darker" side of American life.　Issues touched upon included domineering PTA parents, snobbery, vegetarian lifestyles and turbulent adolescent romance. In one episode, Malcolm desperately wants to escape from a family school festival so as not to be seen with his parents nor have his brothers see his classmates who adore Malcolm. Some of my Japanese students have alluded to similar feelings about their Japanese school festivals.　During discussions, Japanese students' have also acknowledged that most of the above kinds of MITM problems and behaviors occur in many Japanese students' lives. Those that students did not believe existed in Japanese society were used as platforms for discussing cultural differences.　It was clear to me that Japanese students related to this program, and when students relate to the material they are learning, they will retain it longer and deeper. (Chambers 1999).　Having a relevant program is important, but its value can be lost if it is not properly presented. One effective ways to present programs for maximum retention is through the use of Task Based Teaching (TBT).

What is Task Based Teaching (TBT)?

Teachers are often tempted simplify existing film program lesson plans to simply showing a film then have students discuss it, asking students to tell　what scenes s/he likes best.　The predicament I have with this type of procedure is that the audience − usually other students (who were awake during

the program!) weren't really interested in hearing other students' explain, in painfully slow English, an opinion about a subject not relevant to student. Often, the only thing keeping students engaged in the lesson was their desire for a passing grade. The problem with this is that grades focus on performance outcomes, rather than on the process of learning itself, dramatically reducing internalization of important subject matter. By changing a lesson plan to make the goal the completion of a task— task-based teaching (TBT), there are improved student participation, motivation, and satisfaction with the project (Covington 1999). There are different interpretations of what TBT is (e. g. Willis, 1996; Long, 1985; Breen, 1987). What these interpretations share, however, is that TBT is goal-oriented teaching with a clear purpose. TBT is a way of teaching where language is necessary to accomplish some kind of job.

Jane Willis (1996) has broken down task based learning (TBT) into three components: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task (language focus). The pre-task phase has two basic functions: 1) to introduce and create interest in doing a task on the chosen topic, 2) to activate topic-related words, phrases and target sentences that will be useful in carrying out the task and in the real world. A third, optional function is the inclusion of an enabling task to help students communicate as smoothly as possible during the task cycle.

The task cycle consists of the task(s) plus planning and report phases in which students present spoken or written reports of the work done in the task(s). During the task phase, students may work in pairs or groups and use whatever linguistic resources they possess to achieve the goals of the task. Then, to avoid the risk of developing fluency at the expense of accuracy, they work with the teacher to improve their language while planning their reports of the task. Before or during the task cycle, the teacher can expose students to language in use by having them listen or watch a program segment of other people doing the task.

The final phase in Willis's framework, the language focus, provides an opportunity for form-focused work. In this phase, some of the specific features of the language, which occurred naturally during the task, are identified and analyzed. Among the possible starting points for analysis activities are functions, syntax, words or parts of words, categories of meaning or use, and phonological features. Following the analysis activities, this phase may also contain a practice stage in which the teacher conducts practice of the new word, phrases, or patterns which occurred in the analysis activities, the task text, or the report phase (Willis 1996).

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Adapting a Film Program Presentation to TBT

In the process of adapting film program lessons to TBT, I found existing plans could often be used with only minor modifications to be made to fit the definition of a goal-oriented task.

For example, a Lesson Plan for watching a film suggests viewing the film as a whole class and then proposes post film activities.　Variations of these activities include:

1. Small/large group discussion of teacher selected questions.

2. Small/large group discussion of student-selected questions. (Stempleski, S. & Tomalin, B; 1990: 79).

The above lesson plan adjusted to TBT would look something like the following:

Sample Lesson Plan
Adapted from Stempleski, S. & Tomalin, B; 1990: 79, Favorite scenes.

Class Level: Intermediate and above

Time:　Approximately 6 classes @ 45 minutes each.

Materials/ Preparation
One short (20 minutes, less commercials) taped off Japanese cable television, situational comedy television series program: *Malcolm In the Middle*.

Lesson Summary

Students divided into two groups. Each group watches different halves of the program. They'll regroup into pairs to complete a task:　tell each other the half they saw − filling in the gap. Whole class watches again to confirm story. [1*]

Option 1: Have small groups of students choose relevant themes or conflicts in the program and present them to class.

Option 2: Have small groups of students choose a theme or conflict from program.
Then write, rehearse and act out a variation of that theme/conflict with resolution.

[1*] Rational of Lesson. The question I asked myself was: "how does this lesson qualify as a "task based lesson (TBL)," since I have defined TBL as a lesson where students should use language that would be "necessary to accomplish some kind of job." I envision the skills students would use in such a lesson as similar to those in a job where oral presentations were required, and at the very least, students are completing a task of their choosing.

Step	Procedure	Time
Class one (45 minutes) **Step One**	In this pre-task phase, the teacher creates interest in the film and its possible themes by eliciting information about relationships among Japanese family members. Teacher shares information about what American family members might do together, how they treat each other, school events, etc. Teacher brings up topic of US television images of families versus reality. Possibly elicits student's comments about Japanese families on TV vs. reality. Teacher goes over possible film specific vocabulary and phrases. As an aid to understanding, hands out memo sheet with key words: who, what, where, when, why and how printed on it. Students are instructed to try to fill-out sheet as they watch film to use as a reference for the next step.	5 min

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Step Two	Teacher divides class in two. One half leaves room to nearby open room for 10 minutes, and works on questions they'll ask.	20 min
	Other half groups around screen. Teacher rolls first 10 minutes of film – fast forwarding past commercials, and stops at appropriate point. Rewinds and reruns program in English. *	
	Teacher changes groups. First group goes to empty room and works on their information sheet. Second group watches the second half of the program two times– once in Japanese once in English. Time will be about up, but if extra time, students can work on their work sheet.	
	*The program is shown in its subtitled version or Japanese version first, and then in English. (The rational behind this is that to show a program without subtitles or in English first could prove to be de–motivating because the language content would be too difficult for the group. By showing the program in Japanese or in English with subtitles first, students will get meaning and go into the next viewing in English with a positive attitude. Such an attitude would create a pleasant classroom environment conducive to learning. While I could find no evidence supporting L2 acquisition advantages showing a program first in Japanese or in English with subtitles followed by the same program in completely English, there is some support showing that when student's have positive thought patterns about their learning experience, their involvement in the learning will optimized (Ushioda 1997)).	
Step Three (Class 2)	Class two will begin the task cycle, where students will start planning for their report phase. Teacher will pair or if there are an uneven number of students, have students work in threes. (An alternative is to have students work alone to prepare their report – depending on the students level). Students will have to prepare to present orally a report to another pair or threesome of what happened in the half of the program they saw. To avoid the risk of developing fluency at the expense of accuracy, teacher will circulate to work with students to improve their language while planning their reports of the task. Allow one entire class period for this, but tell students that they will have to be prepared to report to their counterpart students the next class. (This time could be extended to two days if necessary – but I prefer to allow more time for the two mini groups or pairs to collaborate for the final retelling the entire story). Allow students to review their portion of the tape in English as necessary.	45 min
Step four (Class 3&4)	Class four continues the task phase where pairs of students will report their half of the program to counterparts. Working together, students use any means necessary to piece the entire program together, and prepare to tell the class (or the teacher – possibly as a quiz) what happened in the program.	45 min
Step Four cont. (Class 5)	Class five finishes the task phase with groups of students either retelling the whole program to the class or to the teacher. (Whether to have students do task in front of other classmates or in front of teacher only should be decided depending on the strength of student's or classes self–esteem and or personality. If students retreat into their shell after making mistakes, the presentation should probably be done for the teacher only. Students could be required to speak a minimum or maximum amount of time. Teacher should take detailed notes or record student's reports.	45 min
Step five (class 6) Wrap–up	In this final class and phase, the teacher can help students focus on and analyze some of the specifics of the language they used during their report phase.	
	Teacher should roll entire film again for al students to see the other half and confirm their understanding of their partner's re–count.	
	Following final viewing, teacher could start analysis of functions, syntax, words or parts of words, categories of meaning or use, and phonological features used by students during the report phase. Following the analysis activities, the teacher conducts practice of the new word, phrases, or patterns which occurred in the analysis activities, the task text, or the report phase.	
	Praise all students for their effort. I allow about five minutes at the end of class for students to complete a survey about how they enjoyed the class. [2*]	

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Program Survey

Please circle the appropriate answer

あてはまる方に丸をしてください。

1. **Did you like this activity?** _____Yes/no

　1. あなたは、この活動が好きでしたか？____ はい/いいえ

2. **Was this activity:** _____difficult/so-so/easy?

　2. この活動は : _____難しかった?/まあまあ/簡単？

3. **Do you feel you learned** _____a lot/so-so/little?

　3. どのくらい学んだ気がしますか_____沢山/まあまあ/少し？

Conclusion

For a myriad of reasons, Japanese college students in my classes often lack drive to advance their English.　Among the four proficiencies students are attempting to improve, the most difficult to motivate students to use is that of oral production. Japanese students do not seem to be either integratively or instrumentally motivated (Gardner 1985) given that few Japanese live in poverty due to lack of English skills, nor desire to immigrate to an English speaking country out of love or admiration. What does appear to motivate students to produce oral English is talking about or reacting to popular culture that touches their lives. Film can provide such content in an authentic context. By using content that is interesting and relevant to students' lives, it is easier for them to make connections between the content and their own thoughts and experiences and is motivated to express an opinion about it (Stempleski, S. & Tomalin, B, 1990).　Once selected, a programs' language and content can leave a deeper and stronger impression on students when it is presented as a Task (Rooney, 1998; Long & Crookes, 1993). Turning the viewing of a video into a Task Based Lesson requires a significant investment of time.　Does the return merit such an investment? I believe the answer is "yes." A properly selected and presented film and activity will help students become more motivated about using oral English by bringing in authentic, current topics to relate to and talk about.

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