

Bridging Cultures: English and American Studies in Spain

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Abstract

The use of audio-visual material in the second/foreign (L2) language classroom has been the focus of research in many studies to date, with findings generally pointing to benefits for the acquisition of the L2. However, to the best of our knowledge, using audio-visual material to lecture on the contents of *Second Language Acquisition* (SLA) courses in higher education, more specifically, in English Philology/English Studies has not been the focus of published research yet. Hence, the present study delves into the use of film and series excerpts, which showcase concepts in the field of SLA, to analyse and discuss contents in our university SLA classes. From the authors' experience, using audio-visual material in such a context may yield benefits both for students (higher motivation and engagement) and for lecturers (more engaging, dynamic, and integrated lessons).

Keywords: *Audio-visual material, higher education, English Philology/English Studies, SLA courses.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of audio-visual material in the second/foreign (L2) language classroom has been the focus of research in many studies to date. Findings generally point to the benefits of its use for the acquisition of the L2, as will be seen below. However, to the best of our knowledge, the use of audio-visual material to lecture on the contents of *Second Language Acquisition* (SLA) courses in higher education, more specifically, in English Philology/English Studies has not been the focus of published research yet. Therefore, the present study delves into the use of film and series excerpts that showcase issues in the field of SLA to analyse and discuss contents in university courses on SLA.

Using audio-visual material in such a context may yield two main benefits, as we have experienced in our classes. First, from the students' point of view, presenting them with realistic examples of theoretical issues that appear in their syllabus may enhance their motivation because they may establish a link between the university classroom and their daily lives where audio-visual material is part and parcel of it. Second, from the teachers' perspective, the use of carefully selected clips may help them to organize classes where issues belonging to different modules of the course can be integrated in the same class session. Our proposal, therefore, analyses several clips from films and series to be used in SLA courses in English Philology/English Studies and is structured in the following way. Section 2 presents the review of the literature dealing with technology as a pedagogical tool and the effects of audio-visual material in the L2 classroom. After this, in line with most research in the field, the most relevant features of audio-visual material that make it

beneficial for SLA courses are introduced. Section 3 includes the analysis of several clips that we have used to explain SLA issues in our own university classes together with a grid we designed to incorporate all the information for lecturers who might be interested in using the same material or who might want to take it as the starting point for the analysis of their own material. Section 4 collects some of the feedback from students after the experience. Finally, a brief conclusion is presented in section 5.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Technology as a pedagogical tool and audio-visual material in the L2 classroom

Nowadays technology is present in everybody's life and has gradually been incorporated into education. From a pedagogical perspective, the main advantages that technological tools present are that they allow for the use of teaching materials that can be accessed online for free and that, according to their descriptors, are interactive and dynamic, bring about collaborative work and are user-friendly. However, as already pointed out by Rosen, Carrier and Cheever (2013) several years ago, technology can become a potential distraction for students and may encourage the use of unreliable sources and promote plagiarism, if the adequate references are not provided. As to teachers, technology may sometimes constitute a time-consuming activity when seeking the appropriate material, and especially if they have not had enough training in the use of technology.

Notwithstanding, employing audio-visual material as one of the possible types of input favoured by technological advances has now become essential in the L2 classroom. YouTube videos, TED Talks, and series and film excerpts (as well as recent platforms like Twitch, or apps like TikTok, which are out of the scope of this paper) have been extensively used in classrooms, very often as supplementary material, because they provide appealing learning environments. Research studies have also incorporated such material to measure the acquisition of L2s. In this sense, findings have often point to the benefits of audio-visual material, as in the case of Gesa and Miralpeix (2022) for the acquisition of English as a foreign language (EFL) vocabulary, Pattemore and Muñoz (2020) for EFL grammar, and Pujadas and Muñoz (2020) for comprehension in EFL, to name but a few studies in our context.

More recently, research has also addressed the acquisition of L2 pragmatics with the support of audio-visual material, both inside and outside the classroom context (see Sánchez-Hernández and Herráiz-Martínez 2018, Khazdouzian, Celaya and Barón 2021, Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor 202, and Barón and Celaya 2022, among others). Furthermore, as claimed by Kramsch (2014) and by Benson (2015), audio-visual material promotes intercultural learning which, from our point of view, should be a relevant objective in pedagogy nowadays.

2.2 Audio-visual material for SLA courses

The description of audio-visual material above leads us to think that films and series may become an excellent tool in SLA content courses in English Philology/English Studies in our context. As stated by Park and Son (2009), audio-visual material presents language input and experiences in meaningful contexts. In relation to films and series, Bruti (2016) claims that they provide contextualized language and offer similarities between fictional and real-life interactions. Besides, it is common knowledge that online audio-visual material of all types is extremely popular among the youth.

However, even if such features make films and series worth considering for courses on SLA, specific research on the way they depict SLA issues is still scarce. An exception is Young-Schotten (2005), who carries out a thorough analysis of how Spielberg's film *The Terminal* depicts adult L2 acquisition in a naturalistic context through the main character (Viktor Navorski), who is forced to live in an airport for political reasons for a year. By means of many illustrative examples, the researcher also compares the way interlanguage is represented in this film to its representation in Curtis' film *Love Actually*, the latter being "simply silly and *The Terminal* a work of genius in terms of their respective representations of human language" (Young-Schotten 2005, 3). Even if not SLA oriented, other studies such as Han's (2022), where the researcher discusses an instance of translanguaging (in a poem in Portuguese) in the Chinese film *Love after Love*, can also be construed as representative of the analysis of SLA in films.

Despite its numerous advantages, the use of films and series to teach SLA contents at higher education has not been the object of published research yet. This is the reason why the present study explores the educational potential that films and series may bring to SLA courses in English Studies/English Philology, offering thus a new perspective on the use of such material, which, contrary to the case of university content courses, is nowadays a valuable tool in the teaching of L2s.

3. SLA TOPICS IN FILMS AND SERIES: A PROPOSAL

Our proposal (see Table 1 below) presents several clips that depict topics which are part of the syllabi in our SLA content courses, some of which we have already used in class with highly successful outcomes. As can be seen in Table 1, from left to right, each of the seven columns provides essential information for teachers to decide which clip to use and also for students to understand the plot in case they have not seen the film or they are not familiar with the series: 1) title of the film or series; 2) link to the YouTube video, if available; 3) summary of the plot in the scene to be used in class; 4) characters' names; 5) specific area or chunk of language that is the target of analysis; 6) broad SLA topic; and 7) SLA subtopics depicted in the sample.

Title	Clip	Plot in the scene	Character	Target of analysis	SLA Topic	SLA Subtopics
The Terminal	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYVaq863oaA	Viktor must learn English to survive in the airport.	Viktor Navorski	Vocabulary	Stages of acquisition	Learning methods
Spanglish	Film	Cristina is angry and shouts at her mother (Flor) because Flor does not want her daughter to attend a private American school where she thinks her daughter would lose her Hispanic culture and identity.	Flor Cristina	"Not space between us"	Social models of SLA	The Acculturation Model Culture shock
English Vinglish	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmGVY4T88dc	Shashi learns English to change her situation and her role as an Indian housewife, and as self-improvement.	Shashi Godbole	"The India; the USA" May; can	ELF Context Interaction The L2 ideal-self Cross-linguistic influence	Classroom context Grammar and pragmatics Pragmatic awareness
Eat, Pray, Love	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WhjXiY8qIBs	Liz is visiting Italy where she makes some friends. Liz is living in India where she wants to find her inner self.	Liz Gilbert	L2 Italian L2 Sanskrit	Attitude Motivation Language awareness	Integrative motivation Grammar Phonetics Translation

Title	Clip	Plot in the scene	Character	Target of analysis	SLA Topic	SLA Subtopics
Friends	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnxPhyZ-Uc	Phoebe is teaching Joey French to help him get a role in a film.	Joey and Phoebe	Unintelligible utterances in (French)	Imitation Motivation	Instrumental motivation
Breakfast at Tiffany's	1:29:15- 1:31:42	Holly is planning to move to Rio with her lover, so she is learning Portuguese.	Holly Golightly	Audio in Portuguese	Oral input	Affective factors
Emily in Paris	Episode 7. 7:05-8:36	Alfie (a British man) is learning French in a classroom context. He is working in Paris and his company makes him attend French lessons.	Alfie	A written composition	Attitude Motivation	Negative attitude Lack of motivation

Table 1: Analysis of clips in relation to SLA topics

As can be seen above, a short excerpt may exemplify different topics at the same time. For instance, in the case of the last scenes of the film *Spanglish*, the following topics are susceptible to analysis: SLA and affective factors, the naturalistic context, social models of SLA, the use of the first language (L1) in L2 interaction, and L2 pragmatics (socio-pragmatic aspects such as power and social distance). Thus, carefully selected clips may help teachers to organise more integrated lessons where issues belonging to different modules of the course can be part of the same session; the contents thus provide a better representation of what acquiring an L2 involves. In other words, since a short excerpt may exemplify different topics at the same time, lecturers can organize sessions with the clip as the focus for the analysis of several SLA issues. This tends to make the rhythm of the class more engaging and dynamic, as experienced in our own practice. Students' motivation and commitment may also be enhanced since they can easily establish a link between the university classroom and their daily lives where the role of audio-visual material is very relevant. Finally, the analysis of such clips in the classroom may also serve as a model for students to work on the clips that they must choose for their own projects, which can be carried out in pairs or in small groups.

4. STUDENTS' FEEDBACK

This section presents some of the feedback provided by students after the implementation of this approach, both as part of the lesson and as a type of a project that they had to complete as one of the course tasks. The 4 excerpts come from students of English Studies at the University of Barcelona who were in their 3rd and 4th (last) year of the degree (academic years 2019-2020 to 2021-2022). Their ideas point to the advantages of using films and series to lecture on SLA, as can be seen below (please see the items in italics). The first two quotations that follow are on the use of films and series by the teacher in class.

1. "As a literature student, I loved how the lecturer organised the subject and how dynamic the sessions were. The teacher *exemplified* SLA scenarios, contexts, terms, and hypotheses through different media types (videos, audio, texts...), mainly focusing on mainstream videos. For instance, we analysed the sitcom *Modern Family* (...). These kinds of materials are *engaging*. I think students, even if they are not interested in linguistics, can tune into the sessions, and *enjoy* a subject that is far from difficult when a methodology like this is applied. (...)."

2. "The use of films and series helped me a lot to understand some SLA concepts, since I think that using audio-visual material in class helps us to *contextualize* and *exemplify* the theories and models that we work on. For instance, the teacher used some clips from the film *Spanglish* to explain and analyse the "Acculturation Model".

Quotations number 3 and 4 below are the students' comments on how they used films and series to carry out their own projects and on the benefits of this type of material.

3. "My group and I analysed a TikTok account. The videos posted in the profile were about a father (English as his first language) and his son (English and German as first languages). The dialogues between them were very exemplifying, and SLA terminology, such as code-switching, could be *identified* in these videos. The fact that students work over media of their choice made the task entertaining, easier, and fun. No extra effort was required, and you were given *freedom* in choosing your topic, which gives a lot of personality to the project".
4. "Our group decided to focus on the acquisition of slang for our project; we used clips from *Emily in Paris*. We wanted to design a project where we could analyse the participants, the *context* and so on from the series itself instead of exemplifying SLA topics".

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented an innovative proposal for content SLA classes in English Philology/English Studies, i.e., the inclusion of films and series both to lecture on SLA contents and to encourage students to integrate them in their projects. The main objective was to share the material and how to implement it in case other university teachers in SLA find it appropriate and useful. As reflected in the students' quotations above, audio-visual material in SLA content courses can help us to prepare engaging lessons that help to bridge the gap between students' out-of-class practices and formal education contexts. Nevertheless, despite the many advantages of input through audio-visual material for the acquisition of L2s found in research, its effects in university content classrooms, as in the present study, are still unexplored.

It is true that preparing lessons in this way might be more time-consuming, but, according to our experience, once students realize the amount of interesting material in films and series, they become involved in the search for clips to be discussed in class and in their projects and this makes the teacher's task easier. Such collaborative work might gradually lead to the creation of an online database to facilitate lesson planning. We think that the database could be created by both university lecturers and students, and, consequently, shared by all members of the academic community. The format could be like the one presented in the table above, or even include critical annotations and very brief essays relating the clips to the corresponding topics. We suggest that in a second phase the clips could also be selected with the aim of analysing a variety of topics in Applied Linguistics, not exclusively SLA, so that the database would be useful in other content classes (e.g., Teaching methods in EFL).

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