Abstract

Apart from Aken (2003), research into using film in language teaching has overlooked the potential of film, streaming video or DVD to encourage sociocultural and ethnolinguistic learning about speaking, particularly among advanced learners. Flanked by a study of literature on film’s pedagogic applications, this paper examines the sociocultural learning about speaking that can develop from applied study of filmic speech in an advanced English as an Additional Language (EAL) course in and about speaking. In particular, this paper describes a form of pedagogy using film studies presentations as tools for rehearsing, presenting and assessing students’ speaking. The research uses a grounded methodology to locate emergent understandings in the transcripts of videotaped presentations and oral reflective logs of 13 second-year students. These understandings articulate aspects of sociocultural learning about speaking which most impact on learners. The data also leads to a consideration of what insights learners can glean about their own voices and identities as speakers of EAL. These understandings and insights corroborate my pedagogy of using films to heighten learners’ awareness of sociocultural aspects of speaking—and our spoken selves.

Introduction: Using film to heighten socio-cultural and self-awareness

This paper reports on a research project designed to identify ways in which using film to teach advanced speaking can enhance learners’ sociocultural awareness and have positive impacts on the learners’ self-conceptions as speakers of English. Teachers of advanced EAL learners can conceive of films as repositories of largely authentic spoken discourse within realized sociocultural contexts. Aken (2003) describes a 14-week film-for-English course where students focused on sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of spoken English and argues that such an approach, grounded in realistic speaking, contributes to autonomy. King (2002) writes, “the realism of movies provides a wealth of contextualised linguistic and paralinguistic terms and expressions, authentic cross-cultural information” (p. 510). Film provides texts to apply pragmatic discourse analysis, speech act theory or conversation analysis, using methods such as those devised by Burns, Joyce and Gollin (1996) for analyzing transcribed authentic texts. More importantly for the purpose of this paper, film, rather than scripts, can depict varieties of Englishes within sociocultural contexts. Learners can be encouraged to focus on sociocultural aspects; on how speaking contributes to collective/ community and individual identities. In film, to an extent, characters are what they talk.

We Are What We Talk (De Silva Joyce & Hilton, 2003), an Australian resource for teaching casual conversation, gestures to a connection between speaking and identity. This suggests that utterances are an assertion of self; acts of speaking portray who we are to others. Tutors with an interest in the sociolinguistic aspects of speaking can focus on far more than speech act theory in exploiting film. Encouraging learners to scrutinise the role of speaking in creating film cultures and characters directs attention to how collective and individual identities are formed. The societies of such various movies as My Fair Lady (1964) and
Whale Rider (2002) are, for instance, characterised in part through how and what the characters “talk,” and the protagonists are themselves characterised through talk, whether it be Eliza Doolittle’s Cockney or Paikea’s young-but-wise Maori English.

Speaking, both that of filmic characters and of students in academic and social discourses, involves a public participative engagement and investment in the verbal self. It combines the personal facets of voice, face and body with the presentation of content. As Miller (2004) explains:

> Speaking is itself a critical tool of representation, a way of representing the self and others. It is the means through which identity is constituted, and agency or self-advocacy is made manifest. In other words, we represent and negotiate identity, and construct that of others, through speaking and hearing. (pp. 293-4)

It could be argued that there are analogical similarities between three aspects of representation through speaking: the student, creating an academic identity in a film studies presentation; the filmic character, fashioning a self through words within the represented world; and the actor, using voice as one method of characterisation. This allows for us to draw on poststructuralist conceptions of identity as being multiple, complex and a site of flux and potential struggle (Norton, 2000). In the words of a maxim attributed to Confucius: “You are as many people as languages you speak.” In a globalised context, it is important to identify oneself as speaking a variety of English, and to be aware of one’s “audibility” (Miller, 2004) as an external register of identity.

Examples of the construction of identities in film—by actors and by characters—are numerous, and this paper will examine 13 examples selected by participants, and refer to other examples. None is more sententious than Henry Higgins’s equation of spoken self and social position in his refashioning of guttersnipe Eliza Doolittle into a lady. He appoints himself to “change her into a different human being by creating a new speech for her” (My Fair Lady, 1964, based on Shaw’s Pygmalion). This famous scene articulates the idea that speaking, involving voice, face and in-person-ness, is a social, public skill projecting the still-evolving self, conscious and otherwise. The students apply this idea to a range of movies from Gone with the Wind (1939) to the Bridget Jones films (2002-4).

Also interesting are actors who create characters, with accent being a keynote of identity creation, sometimes successfully (Meryl Streep’s Polish English in 1982’s Sophie’s Choice or to a more limited extent her “Strine” in Evil Angels, 1988), sometimes less successfully (Anthony Hopkins’s “Invergargillese” in The World’s Fastest Indian, 2005) Film texts do not need the improvisational scripting characteristic of Mike Leigh (Secrets and Lies, 1996) to be authentic texts with authentic characters. Speaking is central to filmic characterizations stylized though they are: Cate Blanchett’s recreation of Katharine Hepburn in The Aviator (2004) or Phillip Seymour Hoffman’s of Capote (2005) rely heavily on capturing the rhythms and tones of the voices of these historic personages. The process of an actor’s accent training, often described in published or DVD-extra interviews that students can locate during the research process, instances the notion of “voice” as something that can be chosen as part of an individual’s negotiation and construction of identity.
Setting up the film studies presentation

That speaking about film can be motivating (Ryan, 1998; Dündar & Simpson, 2004) is supported by my findings. Giving students the chance to talk about film as a speaking opportunity or assessment allows them not only to engage in potentially interesting, individually-selected subject matter, but also to zoom in on how films create characters/identities through their voices and spoken interactions. In and out of their communities, characters define themselves through processes of identification and negotiation. Analysing this allows learners to interrogate the ways in which speaking is vital to an individual’s (and/or a community’s) senses of identity. Further, the learning can be self-reflexive.

A 12-minute film study powerpoint presentation is the final assessment in a second-year speaking course in an EAL degree at a tertiary institute in Auckland. Students select a short clip and prepare a transcript to demonstrate their sociocultural or ethnolinguistic focus. Then, they perform a basic conversation or pragmatic analysis. The task includes non-assessed post-presentation spoken reflective logs as well as the presentation. In the former, students evaluate their performance and their attainment of phonological goals—“reflection on action” (Schön, 1983). They comment on how filmic language increases their awareness of both speaking in globalised contexts and themselves as a speaker of a variety of English. The post-presentation logs, together with transcripted presentations, provide the data for this paper.

The speaking course offers a range of ideational content, beginning with our spoken selves and speaking identities. This leads into a focus on accent, dialect, voice and identity, covering world Englishes and oral culture. Students then explore national, cultural, historical and individual identities in film, analysing speakers of accented or world Englishes (see Rogers, 2004). As a case study, Whale Rider (2002) is anatomized (See Appendix A). Movies selected for the presentations contain characters with relatively non-standard English, such as the Pakistani family in East is East. Film choices should also contain spoken interactions to which analysis can be applied. The assessment serves as a focus for assessing learners’ development in speaking as well as their learning about speaking and identity.

Pedagogy and procedure

Preparation for the film studies presentation covers the final five weeks of a 14-week semester and includes nine two-hour lessons. The process begins (Lesson 1) with vocabulary awareness work on film genre, personnel, techniques and history, building on learners’ existing knowledge. The second lesson uses a transcript of a movie scene—the hitch-hiking scene in It Happened One Night (1934, See Appendix A)—with three showings. The first focuses on context and situation, particularly the historical and social context, the social identities of the interactants, their use of slang and their attitude towards each other. The second focuses on conversational analysis (turn-taking, adjacency pairs). A third viewing directs attention to pragmatic aspects (expressions, gestures, manner, irony). The aim of this three-tier process is to provide a model for the kinds of analysis students will perform in their presentations.

Two lessons in the sequence have a phonological focus and occur in a language laboratory with video equipment. In the third lesson, students analyse the phonological features of the scene from lesson two and/or similar scenes, with particular focus on the actors’—and their
own–pitch, intonation and manner. Lesson six allows the students to identify an aspect of their own speaking, whether it be pause groups, use of pitch, stress patterning or sentence intonation, which they wish to demonstrate improvement in during their presentation. Each student is directed to resources, particularly online and CALL sources, for self-directed learning.

The fourth and fifth lessons, structured around task sheets, involve a movie case study: we watch a film (Whale Rider, 2002) and analyse it using the lexis and applied discourse analysis skills (Appendix A). Students identify a range of features including gendered language, Maori English and idiom, and the ways in which director Niki Caro uses spoken language to tell the story. We focus, for instance on voice-overs used for a retrospective first-person narrative, and on the interactive dialogues and effective monologues, such as Paikea’s speech about her grandfather. Further, we examine how speaking is used to characterise the protagonists. We analyse Pai’s speech in detail and relate it to the film’s main theme: Pai’s evolving identity.

In lessons six and seven, backgrounded by Kachru’s (1982) circles of English, the students perform basic ethnolinguistic analyses, investigating how aspects of speaking–voice, accent, manner, lexis–construct both collective and individual identity. Films such as East is East and Bend it like Beckham (2002) are suitable due to their contrast of migrant and local voices. We identify a range of films featuring varieties of English. The extensive list includes Chinese English (Floating Life, 1996; The Wedding Banquet, 1993); Indian English (Passage to India, 1984; Monsoon Wedding, 2001; Bride and Prejudice, 2004) and Punjabi (Anita and Me, 2002); Japanese English (Japanese Story, 2004; Lost in Translation, 2002; Bridge on the River Kwai, 1957); Vietnamese English (The Quiet American, 2002; Heaven and Earth, 1992) and Singapore English (Chicken Rice War, 2002). Other possibilities include Ebonic and Samoan varieties (as in, for instance, Hustle and Flow, 2005, or Sione’s Wedding, 2005), accents (Kiwi, however we define its filmic production, authentically as in Whale Rider or semi-authentically in The World’s Fastest Indian, 2005), dialects (Cockney, as in Snatch, 2002), invented argots or socially realized “anti-languages” (Nadsat in A Clockwork Orange, 1971; or Valley Girl Speak in Clueless, 1995). This leads to discussion on the role of interlanguages, dialects and idiolects in identity formation.

In Lesson 8, we analyse a past student’s presentation and the tutor offers a live model presentation (on the Kiwi film Rain, 2001) and invites the students to “mark” it using the actual marking criteria used during the course. Lesson 9 gives students a chance to workshop parts of their presentations and gain peer and tutor feedback. Presentations are given and co-assessed the following week. Students complete a spoken reflective log right after finishing their presentation.

**Literature review**

**Speaking and identity**

Speaking can be connected with evolving speaker identity in poststructuralist thought. Norton reminds us that “the role of language is constitutive of and constituted by a learner’s social identity” (Norton, 1995, p. 17) and Miller (2004) describes speaking as “a critical tool of representation” (p. 293). Speaking involves a public participative engagement and investment in proclaiming the verbal self. If discourse is “the site in which identity is manifested”
(Shotter & Gergen, 1989, in Ivanic, 1998, p. 18), then the discourse of the presentation allows learners not only to focus on their own spoken identities, but also to apply these ideas to the world of the film. Gee (1996) reminds us that discourse is “a kind of identity kit” with instructions of how to talk in order to assume “a particular social role that others will recognise” (p. 127). The focus on the course reported on here lies in how [English] is “appropriated to legitimise, challenge and negotiate particular identities for … individuals” (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 13). This involves understanding the students’ desires for access to “imagined communities” (Kanno & Norton, 2004, p. 242). In this case, the discourse of the film studies presentation is the site of assessment and hence of the learner’s “identification” (Wenger, 1998, p. 191) and self-construction.

**Using films to teach speaking**

The virtues of using film to learn about speaking and content are extolled widely in the literature, notably by Sherman (2003) and Aken (2003). These virtues include the authenticity of filmic speech, “the language of daily conversational exchange” (Sherman, 2003, p. 13; see also Aken, 2003; Peterson & Coltrane, 2003; Hwang, 2005) and its value as a language model and as “a window into English-language culture” (Sherman, 2003, p. 2; see also Summerfield, 1993; Kortner, 1997; Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). Research focuses, too, on encouraging critical thinking about controversial issues and media literacy (the “film as content” movement, Cox & Goldworthy, 1995; Williamson & Vincent, 1996; Chappell, 1999). Further, films contain visual support to fast, idiomatic speaking (King, 2002), or subtitles for supporting bilingual connectivity (Herron, Hanley & Cole, 1995; Kikuchi, 1997). Using subtitled DVDs also promotes aural skills and learner autonomy (Elven, 2004). Moreover, Burt (1999, para 3) argues that film “allows learners to see facial expressions and body language at the same time as they hear the stress, intonation, and rhythm of the language,” while Aken (2003) identifies sociopragmatic aspects (inflection, emphasis, irony; p. 52). Speaking about film promotes pragmatic competence, “the knowledge of social, cultural and discourse conventions that have to be followed in various situations” (Edwards & Csizér, 2004, p. 17).

In the same way, ways to use film creatively for specific language points or “whole film approach” fluency-producing applications are enumerated in articles and books for teachers (Canning-Wilson, 2000; Stempleski & Arcario, 2000; Stempleski & Tomalin, 1990, 2001; King, 2002; Aken, 2003; Mejia, 2003; Sherman, 2003; Dündar & Simpson, 2004). Similarly, the general strategic learning skills students can hone via the use of film in pedagogy (from word recognition to understanding discourse structure) are covered in the literature.

**The scripted and ideological nature of film**

Tutors can turn two potential key problems of using commercial films–the facts that they are scripted and carry inbuilt ideological discourse–into virtues. Film scholarship reflects “the field’s long-standing antipathy to speech in film” (Kozloff, 2000, p. 6) largely due to the ideological freight that can be embedded in scripts, spoken by actors. Students have the opportunity to apply sociocultural insights and to speak about them when they unpick this ideology. They may, for instance, look at the Chinese and Malaysian actresses (Gong Li, Ziyi Zhang and Michelle Yeoh) playing Japanese in the English-speaking film *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005) and consider a raft of issues: the political appropriateness of Chinese woman playing geishas; issues related to female voices, power and silence; the
depiction of Asian women in western movies from Anna May Wong to the present and the destabilization of stereotypes. These issues provide opportunities for chatroom-savvy learners to apply both media literacy and speaking skills. Should Chinese stars have been cast as geishas? Is Ziyi Zhang’s interlanguage insulting to Japanese? Does it detract from the film’s credibility, when we consider Yeoh’s barely-accented Malaysian English, or does her voice mark her as more patrician? When students comment on the actors’ interpretation of scripts, they necessarily consider paralinguistic and pragmatic features as well as the adoption of voice for characterization.

Similarly, the scripted nature of films is no barrier. We must note, though, “the difference between a real-life conversation and those portrayed in films is clearly apparent when one reads linguists’ transcriptions of actual talk” (Kosloff, 2000, p. 26). These films were scripted to replicate the verisimilitude of spoken interactions within a specific genre and at a certain point in time. Writers of screenplays write to achieve a particular goal, and in such films as the British East Is East or the Australian Japanese Story (2003), it is in part to create speaking which naturalistically mirrors that of Pakistani migrants or Japanese businessmen. The scripted nature of the speech need not suggest lack of authenticity. Even instances where the spoken language is stilted or stereotypical, like that of the Japanese Commandant in The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957), can be used as touchstones for the real and authentic. Again, this type of critical thinking can consolidate learning about both speaking and speakers.

Methodology

Participants

The participants were 13 adult migrant and international students. All are motivated by various desires to access the power and capital that can be gained by improving their English-speaking selves. The students whose reflections are cited in this study belong to the 2005 intake and comprise two males and eleven females, ranging in age from 19 to 49 and from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Thailand and Sweden. All names in this text are pseudonyms.

Context

This classroom research is contextualised in an assessed presentation and taped reflective comment in a spoken awareness and development paper for Year 2 tertiary learners of EAL in a Bachelor of Arts programme. After giving their assessed presentations, the students recorded a non-assessed reflection on their learning during the preparation, research and presentation stages, and evaluated what they learned about film, about speaking and about themselves as speakers of English. Together with an objective observation of the students’ presentation, recorded on video, these reflections form the basis of the data for this project. While this focuses on individuals’ self-portrayals, it is a flexible method of data collection, heeding what Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) refer to as “the full range of individuals’ linguistic repertoires” (p. 7).
**Process**

The thirteen logs were transcribed and analysed and extracts were taken from the thirteen videotaped presentations. The process of recurrent themes follows grounded methodologies identifying categories from data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As particular themes emerged, they were open-coded, categorized and tabulated. The students’ self-reported reflections were matched with the record of the performance preserved on video.

**Findings and discussion**

The students’ presentations of selected films yielded considerable sociocultural/ethnolinguistic learning about the use of spoken English. Although their film choices tend towards the popular and recent, they are able to attach a thesis about speaking to their research and presentation and carry it through to conclusion.

**Findings from presentations**

Appendix B presents the students’ film choices, their focus and their discovery related to their thesis. The following is a discussion of some of the examples students used in their presentations to illustrate their sociocultural insights. These learnings relate, for instance, to the fact that both idiomatic expressions and features of dialect may be class, era, gender or race-specific or may mark membership of and exclusion from social groups. Learners also analyse the importance of accent and interlanguage as measures of individuals’ places between two cultures in filmic worlds. Other students present insightful discussions on the ways in which actors use idiolects to create eccentric characters or adapt regional accents to bring verisimilitude to their characterizations.

**Discussion: Student analyses**

Jean, presenting *Forrest Gump*, analysed the lead character as the embodiment of the American Dream in the guise of a Shakespearean fool and identified some era-specific idioms (such as “tune off, tune out and turn on”). Her evidence included the wisdom behind his aphorisms (“stupid is as stupid does”), throwaway comments (for instance, “he got me invested in some kinda fruit company,” which turns out to be an allusion to Apple computers) and metaphors involving birds, butterflies and the box of chocolates. Paul, analyzing another Tom Hanks speaking part, “Viktor Navorski” in *The Terminal*, looked at how Viktor’s “Krakozhian” accent was a portmanteau of Bulgarian. Paul learned from the DVD extras that Hanks was taught this language by his wife, Rita Wilson, whose father was Bulgarian. Paul goes on to say that although the character comes from a fictional nation, he is understood to come from somewhere like Bulgaria, or Albania, and the national anthem he sings is musically similar to the Albanian one. In Paul’s analysis, the identity of the character depends on the credibility of Hanks’s accent. Paul concludes by demonstrating that the airport is seen as a global everyplace, where we can hear the accents of, for instance Mexican and Indian workers.

Interlanguage and identity was a focus of four students. Penny examined the satiric use of “Japlish” in *Lost in Translation* and Jenna examined how three generations of Greek women in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* show how migrant accents normalize according to how a person views their relation to the new culture and its ways of speaking. Further, Qing
elucidated Thai English in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, and June, analyzed the features of *Spanglish*. All four films exploited the mispronunciation of interlanguage speakers for comic potential: in Bridget Jones, for instance, a Thai woman calls the protagonist “Bri-sht,” a comment on Thai pronunciation of /dj/. The most interesting of these presentations is that on *Spanglish*, a film focusing on a Mexican woman, Flor Moreno, who refuses to learn English when she moves to the United States with her young daughter, whose English is soon fluent. June refers to Stavans’s (2003) study and lexicon of *Spanglish* to show how the movie articulates his thesis: that Latin American migrants select the “in-betweeness” of identity through their variety of English. Its features include an audible schwa sound at the end of words with a final consonant and the rounding of vowels, as in *loncha* (lunch). All four students also discussed the sociolinguistic issue of speaking as a register of social class: Bridget’s accent and tendency to speak crassly when embarrassed disqualify her from entry into conservative society; Flor’s refusal to upgrade her *Spanglish* into English ties her to life as a housekeeper.

Issues of class identity, accent and “-g-dropping” interested Jill, who compared “slave English” and “polite Georgian English” in *Gone with the Wind*, and Miwa, who tracked Eliza Doolittle’s progress from profane Cockney to cardboard lady in *My Fair Lady*. The processes that British-accented Vivien Leigh and Audrey Hepburn experienced in acquiring Southern American and Cockney accents are discussed too: both used dialogue coaches and learned phonetically. Mark, meanwhile, compared the rhotic Pakistani tones of actor Om Puri’s family in *East is East* with those of the “native Londoners,” using the website http://dictionary.laborlawtalk.com/rhotic for key definitions. In contrast, Indian Puri was acutely aware of identifying phonemic and vernacular features of the Pakistani accent and aimed to use his knowledge to create a Pakistani speaker of English whose accent would not offend British Pakistani migrants.

The experience of actors researching authentic accents is the main focus of Karen’s presentation on *Cold Mountain* and a major aspect of Gerda’s introduction of *Big Fish*, whose idiosyncratic protagonist, Edward Bloom, played by Albert Finney, is identified by his elaborate story-telling and embellished speaking. Karen explains that, despite extensive accent coaching, the faux Appalachian accents of British Jude Law, Australian Nicole Kidman and Texan Renee Zellweger in *Cold Mountain* were criticized as stereotypical. She is interested in the notion that accent is a teachable and a mutable aspect of social identity, arguing that many students of her age (20) select American accents for themselves because this makes them feel less like outsiders to the globalised world.

**Findings from reflective logs**

The next section of findings, derived from analyses of the post-presentation reflective logs, describes five key emergent themes about speaking about film and learning about speaking. In their reflections, students comment on their achievement of their thesis, their sociocultural learning and their learning about their own spoken identities.

**Studying film is a motivating way to learn speaking** (Jenna)

The visual medium, as opposed to aural media (tapes/ CDs/ podcasts), offers ample opportunity for pragmatic analysis while depicting a created culture. Film constructs a spoken text that may be transcribed, allowing opportunities for learning via immersion. The nine
student comments collected under this heading (a comment from Jenna) are general, as in Jill’s comment: “To immerse ourselves in great movies can gain a lot of benefits.” Penny’s comment corroborates the pedagogy: “I learned how to apply a range of basic film elements to my speaking,” and Karen comments: “I really got into the film studies presentation because it was fascinating and I learned a lot.” Sara, who studied Bring It On, said: “I interested in American culture, because it is global culture today for Chinese people, so I wanted to study how the high school girls speak, and learn about what they say.” Her motivation in selecting this film appears connected with the spoken self she would construct for herself. These nine students said they either “really liked” this assignment or found it “interesting” or “useful.” These are comments on how motivating film can be for teaching speaking.

*Lets me see into cultures through language* (Jill)

This finding, a comment in eight of the 13 transcripts, reflects the agenda of the course. This suggests that cultural knowledge can be attained through analysis of films. The comment on Bring It On fits here, and Jill describes how she had contextualised the speaking in *Gone with the Wind* in ethnolinguistic terms: North versus South, white gentry and black help. In both cases, speaking figures identities. Jill also used this as an opportunity to parallel the world of the film with the state of her country today:

> I learned that human nature is incredibly difficult to control–morality become less important when people are in very difficult–no more morality in Chinese culture now–time did not improve people’s avarice–grateful for insight into human nature. Learning this is an abundant harvest for me. (Jill)

Paul and Mark comment on their learning about linguistic and social difficulties faced by migrants, particularly when your own language is the “powerless one” (Mark).

The students who studied Lost in Translation, My Big Fat Greek Wedding, Spanglish made comments about characters who speak a form of the privileged English contrasted with those marked as culturally other through their interlanguages. Karen comments that the realism of Cold Mountain, due in part to the accents, “teaches me about the hardship life in historical Carolina.” Miwa claims that Eliza “loses her real culture when she loses her low-class speaking.” The presentation on Forrest Gump interested Jean because she located idioms from the stages of Gump’s life, and “idioms clearly show us the changing cultures of American.” The most common general comment to emerge in this category suggests that this type of analysis remains challenging: “Second language students need to work hard in order to become familiar with English and other different cultures.” Film has the potential to hold up the mirror to cultures and identity formation.

*I can think more when I watch movies* (Jill)

As exponents of “film as content” maintain, films provoke thinking. In the assessment, this thinking is specifically directed to analysis of spoken language and its application to the themes of culture and identity construction. The student who viewed Big Fish “continuously” thought about the “voice repertoires” of such actors as Albert Finney. There were seven comments along the lines of “A chance to learn from movies, thinking” (Jill) and “I had a chance to understand how actors spoke and act” (Penny). The comments on Bring It On and Gone with the Wind above demonstrate the kind of thinking that students are referring to. One student said that his discovery of DVD extras (on The Terminal) helped him to think about
how Tom Hanks fashioned his eastern European accent. Those who studied *Cold Mountain* and Bridget Jones commented that Zellweger’s creation of characters via their voices “really made [them] think” about whether second language students can also “become” their assumed accent. One of them speaks enviously about a student in another class whose American is so perfect that it must be her *choice* to speak like that.

*I can see speaking is the important part of who we are* (Karen)

One of the theses of the course is that one of the ways in which individuals fashion themselves within a culture is through speaking and voice. It is encouraging that one common theme to emerge was that fictional characters fashion and forge identities in part through their utterances. Each of the 13 students made this point. Mark observed that speaking Pakistani-accented English was linked to “non-Englishness,” not being able to be a true English citizen, while Jenna indicated that second generation Greek women chose to speak more like Americans than like their mothers and grandmothers. Sara showed that how characters spoke in *Bring It On* demonstrated “how cool or not are they.” She mentions that “fag” and “dykeadelic” are regarded as spoken argots in the idiom of the movie, as well as being socially specific lexical items in their own rights. Karen and Mark’s observations concur with Henry Higgins’s: “An Englishman's way of speaking absolutely classifies him.” Unsurprisingly, this was the thesis of Miwa’s presentation on *My Fair Lady*, where she analysed Henry Higgins’s articulation of the link between Eliza Doolittle’s social identity and speech: “It's 'aoow' and 'garn' that keep her in her place/ Not her wretched clothes and dirty face.” Then, her presentation of pictures of Eliza in her Ascot wear demonstrated that clothes, too, make the woman.

Learning about identity and speech can also be reflexive, as in Sara and Karen’s comments about choosing speaking style and accent to gain access to particular imagined communities. Similarly, viewing the video can lead to reflexive learning. As Gerda, after watching her presentation, said:

> I never thought before that I can improve and change a lot from my performance . . . I feel myself is a new person from what I was before when I watched myself on video. You can have a look at yourself and change what you don’t like. You can change a lot of things when you do a presentation. (Gerda)

To understand this process can be affirming to the student. As Sprott (2000) observed, “I know that my students need many affirming experiences–experiences that help them to know who they are and how they fit into the world picture” (p. 50). This presentation has the potential to present similar affirmations by demonstrating that speaking is a vital part of who we are and who we can be.

*Nowadays, we need understanding different accents for business, education* (June)

June’s comment indicates that comprehending non-standard and accented varieties of English speaking may be an investment in one’s future. Although research demonstrates ESL students’ relative difficulty with non-standard varieties of English, an understanding that being able to understand ethnic Englishes is vital is starting to emerge (Rogers, 2004). Nine students commented on the usefulness of listening to accented speech in film. June says: “learning about Spanglish will help me when I go study in American” and Karen states: “different kinds of American accents are very useful to know these days.”
Whale Rider) comments: “I live in New Zealand now and need to understand Maori speaking and slangs like smokes for cigarettes. I must listen carefully.” She articulates a willingness to invest in understanding Maori English. Mark pointed out that in Britain, “racial tolerance is linked with patience of migrant accents, as shown in East Is East.” This paper contends that listening to non-standard speaking prepares students better for interaction in their future imagined communities.

Conclusions

The pedagogical possibilities for utilising well-selected films in the context of an advanced EAL programme extend beyond those covered by the recent research. This paper demonstrates that speaking about film is an effective way to learn about speaking and its connections with collective and individual identity because it is motivating and thought-provoking. As analysis of the student reflections demonstrates, the pedagogy of the film studies presentation does more than “help to bring the outside world into the classroom” (Aken, 2003, p. 52). It leads more specifically to sociocultural and ethnolinguistic learning applicable to appropriate knowledge of speaking and speakers in a globalised world.

Each of the five key findings gives rise to a pertinent conclusion. Firstly, that one specific way in which this may be motivating is that it helps learners to find their own identities as English speakers. Second, films have the capacity to mirror historical and naturalistic cultures and the fashioning of identities within them, and spoken language contributes to their creation. Third, this pedagogical use of film provokes learners to think reflexively about such sociocultural issues as the connections between voice and identity formation. This leads to the more specific fourth point about being able to see the construction of individual identities through voice and action in film study. Accent is not fixed and may be chosen in order to accommodate oneself more completely into an imagined community. Being able to participate in spoken interactions with speakers of non-standard Englishes might also be useful in this regard, and exposure to filmic speech can facilitate this process.

The process opens windows into the ways in which the spoken word exists within discourses, cultures, communities and power groups. Students learn that film is a vast repository of information about speaking. Film is a mirror where screenwriters, directors and actors collaborate to use (amongst other tools) spoken forms to construct characters and cultures. In the same mirror, students can see the created characters asserting and projecting who they are in their fictional cultures, with their own back-stories and complexities. Voice is a vital part of identity and it envelops culture, ethnicity, origin and self, imposed or negotiated. Through filmic speech, audiences eavesdrop on the triumphs, crises, catastrophes and epiphanies of characters. Both the performer and the character, to purloin the terminology of Goffman’s theory of self-presentation (in Ivanic, 1998, p. 19) contain freight that students can unpack to learn about speaking. In many ways, we, like filmic characters, can be what we talk.

The pedagogy needs a clear critical framework for analysing stereotypes and critically explaining the use of interlanguage speakers as objects of humour in Spanglish, The Terminal and Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason. Students enjoy identifying funny moments (“Brishit Jones”) but need to analyse the problematic positioning of the interlanguage-speaking character in terms of the relationship between the artefact (the manufactured film) and the spectator. This means incorporating politicised media literacy into the pedagogy.
Students also need to articulate how and why such films as *East is East* or *Lost in Translation* try to hold a mirror up to nature—or perhaps, sometimes, it is a distorting mirror. Films depicting culture and language clashes need a framework of multicultural diversity or language policy. Benson and Nunan’s (2005) comment about learning diversity is helpful here:

In a world in which the boundaries between sociocultural contexts are increasingly blurred, learned diversity indeed appears to take on a new character, in which the construction of new, and often highly individualised, multilingual identities through second language learning plays a crucial role. (p. 190)

References


Appendix A: Two Sample Applications

Here are two examples of classroom materials demonstrating how films may be exploited to capture sociolinguistic learning.

Sample Application 1: *Whale Rider* (Niki Caro, 2002)

While they watch *Whale Rider*, students take notes under a range of headings such as “Examples of Maori English,” “Words where you hear a Kiwi accent,” “Examples of male and female speaking,” “Spoken genre in the film,” “Utterances about identity,” and “How voice-over is used.” These leads us into ethnolinguistic discussion about Kiwi vowels and idioms and sociolinguistic debate on ideas about gender embedded in language and culture: scenes of women gossiping and working in the kitchen are contrasted with scenes of masculine ritual. We also identify features of Maori speaking: such features as the pluralisation of uncountable nouns (“get your gears”), the use of “the smokes” for “smoking” and the shortening of “brother” to “bro” are readily identifiable. The class consider how Paikea’s speaking remains that of a girl when her connections to her legendary namesake are revealed. We focus on how voice-over uses “written spoken English”–Witi Ihimaera’s prose - as opposed to “spoken written English” to present narrative and back-story. In short, there are discussions on speaking about film and learning about speaking and identity. This is followed up with a close cloze-study of Paikea’s pivotal speech about her “paka” / grandfather, and his role in her identity formation as a “chosen one.” The transcript is available on [http://www.script-o-rama.com](http://www.script-o-rama.com).

Sample Application 2: *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934)

Movies of the 1930s are excellent for pragmatic conversation analysis. There are numerous possibilities in the raising of an eyebrow. Not only do the actors’ voices convey a clarity necessary in early “talking films,” but these films are products of a society and era (post-Depression USA) which valued verbal fluency as cultural capital (Kosloff, 2000; DiBattista, 2001). This was an age of human potential: the figure of the career woman emerged, able to rise professionally if in possession of a quick mind and a clever tongue. The down-on-his-luck American-on-the-street could turn his fortunes around with a bit of clever double-speak and “gift o’ gab.” In 1934, speaking was a form of power.

We analyse the hitch-hiking scene from *It Happened One Night*, the transcript of which, like many films, is available online ([http://www.alexanderstreet.com](http://www.alexanderstreet.com)). Its fast-talking dame is a runaway heiress, Ellie Andrews (Claudette Colbert) on a bus trip from New York into the heartland, and its quick-fire but temporarily luckless hero-in-waiting is a newspaper hack, Peter Warne (Clark Gable), who works out who she is and spots a headline. In sociolinguistic terms, this offers obvious contrasts: gendered language; class-specific speaking; city talk versus country talk. In terms of historical lexicography, there are 30s idiomatic usages (“a smart alek”) and lexis (“panhandling”) aplenty. The pair use rapid, quick-fire, often elliptical speech and witty repartee as a reflection of the battle of the sexes. The potential of this scene for conversation analysis is clear: the turn-taking is crisp and staccato; there is implicature galore.
### Appendix B: Films presented, speaking focus and thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Film Title</th>
<th>Speaking learning focus</th>
<th>Thesis on learning focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td><em>Forrest Gump</em> (1994)</td>
<td>Americanisms and aphorisms through the twentieth century</td>
<td>US culture is seen through the spoken language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td><em>Cold Mountain</em> (2003)</td>
<td>The actors’ creations of historic Carolina accents and dialects</td>
<td>Actors can assume spoken identities so students, too, can choose to speak with an American accent, for instance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerda</td>
<td><em>Big Fish</em> (2003)</td>
<td>A variety of characters are marked by their voices</td>
<td>The voice is a distinct characteristic and marker of individuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td><em>Lost in Translation</em> (2003)</td>
<td>“Japlish”, language and culture clash</td>
<td>Despite the film’s acclaim, the interlanguage spoken here is stereotyped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miwa</td>
<td><em>My Fair Lady</em> (1964)</td>
<td>Identity, the spoken word and class</td>
<td>Eliza did not change inwardly, but her voice was trained to be a lady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td><em>Gone with the Wind</em> (1939)</td>
<td>Southern American accents; characters of blacks</td>
<td>Voices show characters’ moral worth; black discourse is more non-grammatical and elliptical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qing</td>
<td><em>Bridget Jones: Edge of Reason</em> (2004)</td>
<td>Speaking and social class; “Thailish”</td>
<td>Bridget’s status is marked by her lower-class accent; Thai-English interlanguage is characterised by sound-dropping and mispronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td><em>Bring it On</em> (2000)</td>
<td>The speaking of US high school teens and cheerleaders</td>
<td>Many marks of an idiolect are here, including slang, to show group inclusiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td><em>The Terminal</em> (2004)</td>
<td>Tom Hanks’s invention of a speaker of a fictional Eastern European language</td>
<td>Phonetic features of the language are similar to Bulgarian; the process of learning speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td><em>East is East</em> (2000)</td>
<td>Voices of Pakistani family clashing with Londoners</td>
<td>Film-maker uses the clash of accents to show the Pakistani asserting identities for political purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td><em>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</em> (2002)</td>
<td>Old Greek generation and new Americanised Greek generation</td>
<td>Although Greek interlanguage is used comically, generational identity is part of Nia Vandalos’s autobiography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td><em>Spanglish</em> (2004)</td>
<td>A Spanish speaking servant in an American household</td>
<td>The interlanguage Spanglish is the site of comic misunderstandings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>