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Introducing Movie Novelization

Introduction

The purpose of this short paper is to introduce a variant of Extensive Reading (itself a sub section of the Comprehension Approach to second language instruction) to a wider audience. Movie Novelization was developed and extensively assessed in Japan. The methodology however, was not designed to meet any special needs Japanese learners have in their attempts to master English in a classroom setting. It is based on a theory of language acquisition, and should therefore be equally applicable in any number of EFL/ESL situations. The paper examines the theory which MN is based on, then on to describe how MN has been used in practice, and concludes with a brief discussion of research on MN.

Definition. *Movie Novelization* (movie tie-in novels) are popular movies transformed into print, faithful to the movie but with the sights and sounds transformed into dialog, interior monologue, narration, and description. They appear after movie releases, and fit somewhere between graded readers and trashy, popular fiction. In outward appearance, they are indistinguishable from other popular fiction in paperback form. *Movie Novelizations* are not movie transcripts, they are a novelized form of the movie itself.

Underpinnings of the Movie Novelization Program

Theoretical. The *Movie Novelization* Program is based on the idea that comprehension is a requisite for learning. Simply put, learners must in some way or another understand the meaning of what they encounter in their learning environment, be it in written or oral form, if they are going to learn. Regardless of whether one is inclined to support the strong version of the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1983a), asserting that comprehensible input leads directly to language acquisition (Krashen, 1982), or the weaker version of the hypothesis, that comprehensible input under certain restraints can, but does not necessarily, lead to acquisition (Ellis, 1986), both researchers and professional foreign language classroom practitioners would agree that without comprehensible input no meaningful language acquisition is likely to take place (but also see White, 1987). A corollary of this need for comprehensible input is that more input is better for learning than less input. The amount of comprehensible input in other words, matters. Reading *Movie Novelizations* seems an ideal vehicle for supplying this needed comprehensible input, because once the movie has been viewed, understanding is assured. It then becomes a matter of sitting down and reading the accompanying *Movie Novelization* through.

Movie Novelization, original version

Classroom procedures

The Movie Novelization Pilot Program. The twenty four week school year was divided into six four week sessions. On the initial week of the session, the learners were shown the first part of a contemporary popular film. On the second week of the session, the original film was viewed until it concluded. In the time remaining, students were instructed to silently read the Movie Novelization corresponding to that particular film. Students who did not have the correct book with them were allowed to read other material in English, often Movie Novelizations that they had not yet finished. Silent reading was continued during the third session, while the fourth session was devoted to the writing of a film review on the movie in question. Students were asked to finish reading one Movie Novelization per month, mostly at home as homework. The movies chosen for viewing were in the pilot program were *Dead Poets Society*, *My Girl*, *The War*, *Braveheart*, *The Net*, and *The Assassins*. The students were also required to read a novel of their choice as summer vacation homework (most but not all of them choosing other, unrelated Movie Novelizations). Weekly homework journals were also kept (this was a composition class), normally on themes related to the movies, assigned by the instructor. Except for written comments in the students' journals, there was no overt language instruction in the class. In order to apply pressure to complete the assignments, each student was asked how many pages he had read on the current Movie Novelization each week when the class roll was called. In order to show that the instructor believed that massive comprehensible input is necessary for second language acquisition to take place, during the silent reading sessions, the instructor read a long novel in Spanish. Although many of the learners most probably did not actually finish all seven novels (the six assigned during the school year, and the seventh read as summer homework), they all read at least parts of all of them, witnessed by the instructor during the silent reading sessions. Even the least diligent of the class averaged at least fifty pages read per novel, for a minimum total of 350 pages, which is a far cry more than the normal ten pages intensively 'read' in the grammar-translation classes. The most diligent students read all seven novels, for an estimated total of over 2,000 pages. And of course all learners saw the six films in their entirety, for an additional ten-twelve hours of aural input. Many of the learners reported re watching the films at home, for even more listening practice. In summary then, the Movie Novelization Pilot Program consisted of watching six contemporary films, reading the seven movie tie-in novels, and writing seven formal film/book reviews, all of which were designed to furnish massive comprehensible input.

Research findings

Table One. Research reports on the original movie novelization program**.**

study	area 1	area 2	area 3	qualitative	academic major	problems
Zimmerman & Redfield	proficiency (MAT) +	listening (IELTS) +	x	very positive	English majors	few subjects
Redfield	x	x	x	very positive	English majors	no control group
Redfield	reading (SRA) +	listening (CLT) +	vocabulary (AVT) +	x	English majors	no control group
Redfield	reading (SRA) +	x	vocabulary (CVT) +	very positive	English majors	no control group
Miller & Redfield	reading (SRA) -	x	x	x	English majors	one semester

+ = statistically significant gains or differences

- = no statistically significant gains or differences

x = area not assessed

Harry Potter, adding audio and L1 support

MN was revised in 2005 to give more support to the learner. In addition to showing the movies upon which the books were based, MN now uses dramatic readings of the works played simultaneously with student reading, to supply both aural and 'pacing' support, and L1 translation for further support in understanding the L2 written material. The use of translation is however, restricted to personal support at home, and plays no part in classroom MN.

The revised MN used the first three novels of the popular Harry Potter series of young adult fantasy fiction as the basis for the course. HP was chosen because the movies stick with the original plots very well, MP3 dramatic readings are available, as are L1 Japanese translations. In the future other novels with these same characteristics may be introduced as well.

Classroom procedures

The first three books of the ongoing Harry Potter series of young adult fiction were chosen for use in the audio MN program. These were selected because of their popularity, their target audience, and also because the related movie versions of the work coordinate quite closely with the novels. In addition, there are authentic audio versions of each book, spoken in a wonderful, dramatic rendition. Finally, all three books are readily available in Japanese translations, which the learners were strongly recommended to read at home.

The twenty-four week school year was divided into three sessions, one for each of the Harry Potter novels selected. On the initial week of each session, the learners were shown the first part of the corresponding Harry Potter film. In each subsequent class period (one per week for the traditional ninety minutes) in the cycle, the learners read their novels while listening to the accompanying, authentic dramatic reading of the work. At the appropriate time, the final section of the movie was shown in class, followed by however many classes it took to finish reading the novel. The cycle was then repeated for the next Harry Potter novel. The rational behind the program was to provide massive amounts of comprehensible input, in order to facilitate language acquisition. There was no overt language instruction in the class.

There were 25 classroom sessions during the the 2005/6 academic year. Testing and movie viewing took approximately six classes, leaving 19 classes for extensive reading. Between 50 and 55 pages were covered in each class (time also being used to take attendance, and provide breaks). All of this means that MN participants read slightly over 1000 pages of English during class over the course of the year. They read all of books one and three in class, and most of book two. The remainder of book two was assigned for summer homework (no effort was made to see if the learners actually completed this assignment). And of course all the learners saw three films, for an additional six plus hours of aural input. The learners were encouraged to re-watch the films at home, for even more listening practice. They were also asked to read the Japanese translations at home before reading the originals in class, to provide yet more comprehension support. The whole idea behind using MN is to give comprehension support (through movies, audio tapes, and previous translation) to extensive reading of authentic (and interesting) material.

Research findings

Table Two. Research reports on the revised movie novelization program.

study	area 1	area 2	area 3	area 4	academic major	control group
Redfield	proficiency (cloze) -	listening (CLT II) -	reading (SRA/MAT part III) +	x	Engineering majors	composition
Redfield	proficiency (cloze) control +	reading (SRA/MAT part III) + both groups	writing fluency +	writing accuracy -	Engineering majors	storyline listening
Redfield (one semester, 450 pages)	proficiency (cloze) -	reading (SRA/MAT part III) -	x	x	Engineering majors	storyline listening

+ = statistically significant gains or differences

- = no statistically significant gains or differences

x = area not assessed

Conclusion

Movie Novelization, in either of the forms presented here, has shown in a number of studies (but not in all studies) to be a very effective at providing the comprehensible input necessary for Second Language Acquisition. College aged academic learners studying in MN classes have improved their EFL proficiency, reading, listening, writing, and vocabulary skills. The results apply to both English and non English majors. MN does take time however. It has not proved to be effective in shorter courses. If the materials (books and movies) and technology (projectors, DVD players, audio players) are available, it is certainly worthwhile to try MN outside of its home base (Japan).

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