Film clips in Scandinavian language instruction: Building student competencies

ABSTRACT

This article argues that incorporating film clips into instruction of the Scandinavian languages, both at elementary and advanced levels, provides an authentic and contextual model not only for developing linguistic competencies, but communicative and intercultural skill sets. Film clips can combine curricular goals with invaluable opportunities at all learner levels for critical intersectional analysis that accelerates language acquisition as well as intercultural awareness. Such a use of film clips may accelerate language acquisition as well as intercultural awareness. Foreign language teachers have long valued feature film for its rich cultural content, but its use in the language curriculum has presented a quandary to instructors given its length and students' difficulty in comprehending the rapid flow of speech. This article will consider the great potential that film has for foreign language instructors and the means for its exploitation in the foreign language curriculum. We begin by describing Berkeley Language Center (BLC)'s online database of films and clips, the Library of Foreign Language Film Clips (LFLFC), one possible resource of clips for the language instructor. We then describe how language instructors might use film in the foreign language curriculum, drawing on examples first from elementary Swedish and then from intermediate/advanced Danish.

KEYWORDS

film clips
language acquisition
intercultural competence
Ruben Östlund
Lukas Moodysson
Matador

FEATURE ARTICLE

CHRISTIAN GULLETTE, MARK KAISER AND KAREN MØLLER
University of California, Berkeley

Film clips in Scandinavian language instruction: Building student competencies

This article argues that incorporating film clips into instruction of the Scandinavian languages, both at elementary and advanced levels, provides an authentic and contextual model not only for developing linguistic competencies, but communicative and intercultural skill sets. Film clips can combine curricular goals with invaluable opportunities at all learner levels for critical intersectional analysis that accelerates language acquisition as well as intercultural awareness. Such a use of film clips may accelerate language acquisition as well as intercultural awareness. Foreign language teachers have long valued feature film for its rich cultural content, but its use in the language curriculum has presented a quandary to instructors given its length and students’ difficulty in comprehending the rapid flow of speech. This article will consider the great potential that film has for foreign language instructors and the means for its exploitation in the foreign language curriculum. We begin by describing Berkeley Language Center (BLC)'s online database of films and clips, the Library of Foreign Language Film Clips (LFLFC), one possible resource of clips for the language instructor. We then describe how language instructors might use film in the foreign language curriculum, drawing on examples first from elementary Swedish and then from intermediate/advanced Danish.
1. There are other sources of clips, such as YouTube, and other types of video, such as TV news casts, that can be used productively in the foreign language classroom, but the LFLFC has certain advantages: there are more options with subtitles than one typically finds on YouTube, and the LFLFC clips come with heuristic tools (vocabulary lists, slowed audio) to aid in language comprehension. Moreover, they will not be taken down.

2. Under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), it was illegal to make copies of DVDs until 2009, when the Librarian of Congress issued an exemption, permitting universities to make copies if the copied work falls under the fair use provision of US Copyright law.

Our article is divided into four parts. We begin by examining the Berkeley Language Center’s Library of Foreign Language Film Clips (LFLFC), a growing database of tagged clips taken from (mostly) feature film, some TV serials and some documentaries. We then consider the broader context of film in the foreign language curriculum, and then look at specific examples of how clips may be employed in an elementary Swedish class and an intermediate/advanced Danish class.

THE LFLFC

In 2008, a French language instructor at UC Berkeley approached staff at the Berkeley Language Center (BLC) asking whether it was technically and legally possible to create some clips from films to show her students. A few days later, a Russian instructor made the same request. Anticipating an increasing demand for film clips for use in language instruction, the BLC decided to systematize the process and put the clips into an online database, which had to be searchable, had to include heuristic tools to help students decipher the language they were hearing, and had to allow viewing of clips over the Internet. More than a year went into development of the website, and when the Library of Congress allowed universities to circumvent the copy protection on DVDs, the ripping of DVDs and cutting them into clips began in earnest.

As of September 2016, the database contains 2344 films in 49 languages, with about fifteen films added weekly. Films include classics and pop culture, with dramas and romantic comedies the most heavily represented genres. Films are chosen based on recommendations from faculty, film librarians and film reviews in mainstream media. No effort is made to single out for inclusion or exclusion particular genres or types of film (popular, classical, art house, anime and so on), although for language teaching purposes, dramas and romantic comedies seem to work best. After purchase, the film is accessioned with bibliographic data (original title, English title, director, year, studio, distributor, genre, where purchased). When funding permits, native speakers, usually language lecturers or graduate students, are hired to cut the film into clips and tag each clip (i.e., the tagger gives the clip a title, description, year portrayed; breaks the language into dictionary forms (e.g., ‘The guy who gave you the drugs is a snitch’ would be tagged: ‘guy’, ‘give’, ‘drug’, ‘snitch’), and, using a controlled vocabulary, describes the cultural, linguistic and discursive content of the clip, e.g., a scene between a doctor and a patient from a rural region discussing the latter’s medical condition might be tagged for ‘health’, ‘dialect’, ‘jargon’, ‘metaphor’, ‘greeting’, ‘register’, etc., depending on what was said. At present the LFLFC has accumulated 17,500 clips (average length 2’30”) from 400+ films in 25 languages.

The database consists of three main components: an administrative section for accessioning films, creating clips and maintaining user accounts; an instructor interface, where instructors can search for clips, add annotations and order clips for student viewing (see Image 1); and the student view, which includes the film clip, a stretched version of the audio, a short description of the contents, a list of the vocabulary spoken in the clip, any annotations added by the instructor, and information about the film (see Image 2). When ordering clips, instructors can choose which of these features will be available to students.

To date, in part because of the funding sources and in part because of the number of students potentially affected, there has been comparatively less...
activity in the Scandinavian languages. As of 24 July 2016, the LFLFC contains the following distribution of films/clips in Scandinavian languages, with some other languages thrown in for comparison purposes (see Table 1).

New films and clips are continually being added, and instructors may request the addition of any film. The addition of clips depends on funding or the interest of language instructors to contribute clips on their own time. Clipping and tagging a film is a laborious process – roughly, an average 100-minute film yields about 40 clips of average duration 2'30", requiring approximately 45 minutes to cut and tag the average clip.

Recently, Film Studies faculty at Berkeley have been using the LFLFC to cut clips to illustrate various filmic devices or to focus on particular scenes in a film. A new version of the LFLFC is under development, and it will include a list of filmic terms with examples of clips. Language instructors will be able to provide translations of the terms and include them and/or useful phrases such as ‘in the background of the scene’ when the clip is delivered to the language student. In this we see the potential for a closer relationship between foreign language study and film studies.

The LFLFC (http://blclvideoclips.berkeley.edu) is available to any non-profit educational institution at no cost. Each institution indicates within the LFLFC which films on DVD that institution owns, and then the institution
Distribution across languages has been a function of instructor interest and opportunity. Finnish has more clips because visiting Fulbright students worked on the clips as part of their work responsibilities, and Danish has more than Swedish or Norwegian because a native speaker sought employment at the BLC. These are accidents of opportunity rather than any deliberate design.

Table 1: Films and clips in the LFLFC, selected languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th># Films in LFLFC</th>
<th># Films w/clips</th>
<th># of Clips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwegian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for LFLFC:</td>
<td>2261</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>17,657</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Films and clips in the LFLFC, selected languages.
acquires access to any existing clips from those films. Please contact the
Associate Director of the BLC, currently Mark Kaiser, at blc_associatedirec-
tor@berkeley.edu if you are interested in pursuing access to the LFLFC by
your institution.

1. FILM AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Outside natural conversation there is no other medium quite like film as a
model of the colloquial spoken language for students studying the language.
Although the script is typically written, rehearsed, memorized and performed
multiple times until the take is just right, we, as viewers watching a film in
our native language, suspend disbelief and accept the dialogue as ‘natural’.4
Moreover, unlike talking heads in video interviews or the highly scripted
skits accompanying foreign language textbooks, the range of language and
emotions to be found in feature film and television drama is extensive, from
interactions at the workplace to family meals to exchanges between parents
and teachers to commercial transactions. In style and register these scenes
capture the language of a broad spectrum of social classes, regional dialects
and levels of education; in content they comment on societal norms of behav-
ior and contemporary social, political and economic issues from the perspec-
tive of the culture under study.

Moreover, a film is authentic.5 The foreign language textbook and
accompanying audio-visual materials typically display a grammar and
vocabulary in middle-class educated speech that has been carefully
sequenced, with new material painstakingly explained. The representa-
tion of culture is carefully controlled and sanitized. In contrast, film
will often deal with sensitive topics (socio-economic issues or crises of
identity that some students might find unsettling), and the language
(jargon, slang, extensive vocabulary and grammar that the student has
not learned) makes comprehension at the elementary and interme-
tiate levels very difficult. Therefore, tasks must be carefully designed with
the language of the clip and the level of the student taken into account.
On the other hand, the authenticity of film – its inherent foreignness –
is highly motivating for language learners.

2. FILM AND LITERATURE

As noted in the 2007 MLA Report, ‘Literature, film, and other media are
used to challenge students’ imaginations and to help them consider alterna-
tive ways of seeing, feeling, and understanding things’. Although both film
and literary texts (poetry, plays, short stories, novels) can be used to explore
the target culture, there are key differences between film and literature. The
literary text does not constrain the reader to an instantaneous under-
standing of the text. The student may stop, look up a word in a dictionary and
reread, even in a classroom setting. Each student sets her own pace. But if
a film is shown in class, the rapid flow of speech leaves many students lost.
Entire phrases go by while the student tries to understand what had been said
previously. Typically, instructors rely on subtitles (in English) or captions (in
the target language), but with subtitles students are interpreting the culture
through another language (and one wonders how much language acquisi-
tion really takes place), and with captions a listening exercise becomes one of
reading. Moreover, by focusing on the subtitles or captions, students might
miss important keys to meaning (facial expressions and gestures, details of
4. This is not just an impression. Analysis of Hollywood filmic
texts compared with speech corpora found only minor
differences (Forchini 2012). However, certain
genres of film or individual films may
be quite distant from the norms of everyday
speech.
5. In the foreign language
community, authentic
materials are those that
were created not for the foreign
language learner, but for a native speaker
audience.
setting, lighting and so on). One cannot expect foreign language students at beginning and intermediate levels to understand a film clip, much less an entire film, through a one-time showing in class. However, clips assigned as homework, with various aids and carefully designed tasks, can be watched multiple times at home, affording students the time to prepare for classroom discussions the following day.

Film and literature differ in another significant way. A literary text is ambiguous and open to multiple readings. A line of dialogue on the printed page can be read with different intonations, significantly changing the meaning of the text. The student reading a description of a Norwegian hytte (cabin) in winter will project onto the scene a mental image of something that is familiar, but it may well differ from what a hytte actually looks like. Film is also open to interpretation, but the range of interpretations is restricted by what we see and hear: the building itself, or characters’ facial expressions, their gestures, the reaction of other characters, the intonations used and so forth. At the same time these factors make what is foreign and different more obvious.

CLIPS

The amount of language in a 100-minute film will vary considerably, but most students, with the exception of those in the most advanced classes, will be overwhelmed by a feature-length film and lose interest if subtitles are not provided. But clips of one–four minutes in duration have distinct advantages: the amount of language is manageable and students can play the clips over and over. Clips afford a close reading of the text. Students can focus on the specific words used, the setting, and the way the scene was shot in order to understand its meaning. This approach works especially well when the focus is on language and interaction. An isolated clip will be too decontextualized for exploring character development, references within a scene to other scenes in the film, the interweaving of language from one character to another or the overall meaning of a film, but to the extent that students are focused on understanding language use, clips are a particularly useful tool.

In fact, many instructors using the film clip library have found that the most effective way of working with a film is to assign an entire film over the weekend, with subtitles so that students acquire a basic understanding of the film as a whole, and then in the subsequent week work with clips of key scenes without subtitles, focusing on the language, culture and filmic devices.

CLIPS AND COMPETENCIES

Clips can be used to develop various competencies in students, primarily through homework assignments with specific tasks (Kaiser 2011): linguistic competence, i.e., pronunciation, listening comprehension, vocabulary development and recognition of grammatical structures; communicative competence, i.e., the ability to express one’s ideas, describe and narrate; pragmatic competence, i.e., when to speak and what to say in particular contexts; interactional competence, i.e., rephrasing, visual clues to understanding; intercultural communicative competence, i.e., a recognition of the cultural values and attitudes expressed through the language and setting of the scene; visual literacy, i.e., an understanding of the cinematic devices (camera, lighting, editing and so on) employed and how they contribute to meaning; and symbolic competence,
i.e., the use of the symbolic power of language to project or acknowledge power, reference historical events or reframe discourse (Kramsch 2006, 2009; Kramsch and Whiteside 2008).

Tasks for developing linguistic competence might include cloze exercises (a text of the dialogue with words left out for students to fill in) with varying amounts of vocabulary provided, depending on the difficulty of the dialogue and the level of the students. For the most advanced students this might involve the creation of subtitles in the target language, which not only involves listening comprehension but also a recreation of the grammar, since morphological forms are often truncated or go missing entirely in rapid speech. Alternatively, creating subtitles in their native language assesses students’ comprehension of the original text. To develop communicative competence one might have students describe the setting or the physical traits of the characters, speculate on their emotional state, or narrate the events of the scene (Sherman 2003). The other competencies noted above might require more direct pedagogical intervention on the part of the language instructor. Was the behaviour displayed in a scene a cultural norm or an aberration? Is that middle-class housing or something available to only the higher echelons of society? What is the power relationship between the characters in a scene and how is that represented through language, gesture or cinematic devices?

After working through a scene in depth, students might be asked to speculate on what happened before or will happen next, or to insert themselves into a scene and rewrite the script with themselves as active participants. Such an exercise would involve a reframing of the original scene and require them to imagine how the filmic characters might react to their presence as foreigners.

FILM CLIPS IN THE ELEMENTARY SWEDISH CLASSROOM

The use of film clips can be just as vital to the beginning learner as the advanced learner, even in the initial weeks of elementary-level language instruction. In fact, it may prove critical to provide students with access to film clips, YouTube videos, Facebook Live and other forms of contemporary digital and social media in these first weeks to provide a level of authenticity for a generation of students used to experiencing primary linguistic communication in these modalities. In addition, hearing a language such as Swedish for the first time in the paced clarity and decontextualized repeated patterns of a textbook audio recording can be very different than hearing the subtle tonalities and differing accents of Swedish spoken by native speakers in a film clip. Both methodologies are important, but the latter may encourage students to learn to relax into the unpredictability, patience and self-forgiveness necessary to acquire language. If students receive ample reassurance that listening for a select short list of words and/or phrases is an assignment’s sole task, for example, such targeted objectives will not only lead to comfort with advanced media, but also to the early exposure of a language’s contextual and situational use. Of course, language in film never abandons its mediation, but it nevertheless introduces an alternative to print media and offers linguistic variance to the instructor’s particular speech pattern. Having already examined the overall argument for incorporating film clips in the language learning classroom and with an understanding of what the BLC database can offer, this section of the article will take the form of a practicum that explores examples of film clip usage in the elementary level classroom.
EXAMPLES OF FILM CLIP USAGE

For several years, beginning Swedish language classes at UC Berkeley have used a language learning textbook, Rivstart A1 + A2 (Jumpstart A1 + A2) that introduces vocabulary based on the family in a dialogue entitled ‘Är du gift?’ (Are you married?) (Scherrer and Lindemalm 2007: 15). Ignoring for a moment the cultural normativities reinforced by introducing the concept of kinship through conventions of marriage, the short dialogue provides a textbook filled with common Swedish terms for both normative and non-normative pairings. If the textbook assumes that by the end of the first chapter students can read, comprehend and even duplicate their own three to four sentence short texts, then this marks an ideal place to support this concept with a film clip that reinforces this same vocabulary. This section will address the curricular applications of film clips then suggest ways of using the same and/or additional clips to simultaneously develop intercultural communicative competencies.

The opening scenes of the Swedish film Turist (Force Majeure) (2014) by director Ruben Östlund provide several potential clips that can be used to develop linguistic and intercultural competencies. For example, in one early scene (0:03:50–0:04:50) the spectator sees a father (Tomas) and son (Harry) entering the lobby of a ski lodge and joining the mother (Ebba) and daughter (Vera) at the front desk. Ebba asks a woman standing next to her, ‘Så du har barn?’ (So, you have kids?), to which the other woman replies, ‘Mmm, jag har två tjejer’ (Yes, two girls) (0:03:58). This simple exchange mirrors that of the ‘Are you married?’ textbook dialogue, but this film clip introduces students to some unexpected challenges. First, Ebba’s question does not use the verb–subject word order that students have learned is the rule for questions. With guidance, they may be able to deduce the reason: it is more a statement than an actual question. In addition, students may or may not notice that Ebba is Norwegian, a useful point of departure for introducing the notion of differences among the Scandinavian languages and even Swedish dialects. Finally, the other woman does not reply with the expected affirmative ‘ja’ (yes) or negative ‘nej’ (no), but with a sound, ‘mmm’, that implies ‘yes’. In fact, Swedish contains several sounds or expressions that connote ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘maybe’, such as an inhaled ‘ahhh’ (yes) and ‘njaa’ (not really, sort of), providing more material for a follow-up class. Ebba’s next question asking how old the children are (0:04:01) employs Swedish question word order, but uses the Norwegian pronoun for ‘them’. At this point, the textbook has not introduced numbers, so students may not comprehend the answer ‘eleven and twelve’ nor the two subsequent lines of dialogue before the clip ends. However, they will recognize certain vocabulary for the family as well as the farewell phrase Ebba’s acquaintance uses, ‘Ha en bra dag’ (Have a good day) (0:04:28), which the textbook introduced on the course’s first day. Though students may struggle with some of the dialogue, they will have listened to a more authentic version of the exchange presented in the textbook.

This film clip contains several potential ‘teachable moments’ about Swedish grammar and vocabulary appropriate to the textbook’s first chapter. For example, students can be asked to review a list of various ways to say ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘maybe’. The next lesson begins with students practicing the three skills sets covered: (1) posing yes/no questions to one another using appropriate word order; (2) asking about kinship in a way that utilizes recently acquired vocabulary; and (3) responding using one of several different ways to indicate ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘maybe’. The lesson’s next activity might be...
Film clips in Scandinavian language instruction

1. reviewing basic features of Swedish pronunciation that make it distinct from Norwegian, thus reinforcing the chapter’s final page covering the alphabet and how letters are pronounced. Another assignment might ask students to listen for the words used to describe the family, then compose a short text in Swedish modelled after the one in the textbook describing the family as pictured in the scene. Alternatively, students can be asked to compose a short text about their own families and bring this to class. The students then interview one another practicing appropriate questions and answers about kinship.

2. Film clips from *Force Majeure* and other films also provide an opportunity to link linguistic competency to intercultural competency. In a classroom with a focus on Swedish language immersion, such discussions would be difficult, particularly for beginning learners. To avoid defaulting to English during valuable class time, online discussion threads and written assignments completed outside the classroom may facilitate these analytical conversations without infringing on language acquisition objectives. Film clips thus achieve both objectives: they are useful tools for promoting language acquisition and also broaden cultural awareness, challenging students to question preconceived perceptions and viewpoints.

3. In particular, clips from *Force Majeure* can be used to potentially complicate easy assumptions about Swedish kinship and domestic life, especially the stereotype of Sweden as an egalitarian society that has dispensed with traditional gendered expectations. For example, the teacher may first ask students to view a clip from early in the film that depict heteronormative domestic tranquility (0:07:56–0:10:49) with images of the parents and children brushing their teeth as a unit and sleeping as a unit, even dressed alike. In these shots, the children are literally mirror images of their parents. Students then contrast these images with the film’s pivotal narrative moment, in which Tomas, during what appears to be an avalanche, grabs his cell phone and flees, leaving behind his wife and children. When the snow clears and it becomes apparent that it was a controlled avalanche, he returns to the family, but everything has changed (0:10:50–0:14:30). This leads to a scene in which the children, clearly traumatized by the day’s events, sit awkwardly at the edge of the hotel bed or on the floor, refusing to talk with their parents (0:18:57–0:21:00). An additional scene near the end of the film goes further towards breaking down normative gender stereotypes (1:37:00–1:40:15) as the father, now in a state of emotional breakdown, weeps in front of his wife and children, who comfort him. Although students at the beginning level do not have the linguistic competence to discuss gender stereotyping in Swedish, they can be introduced to the basic vocabulary of emotions to describe various expressive states in these scenes. For a more complex analysis, they would need to use English in monitored online discussions or in a follow-up written response. More advanced students could prepare a Swedish-language response at home and then come to class with their commentary and list of new vocabulary words to share with the class.

4. The topic of kinship also opens the door to using film clips to interrogate stereotypes of the egalitarian Swedish social welfare state. At home, students view a clip from Lukas Moodysson’s *Fucking Åmål* (*Show Me Love*) (1998) that shows two teenage sisters having breakfast (0:01:23–0:02:15), a familial scene strikingly different from the projected tranquility of the early clip from *Force Majeur*. The younger, Elin, discovers that her sister has taken the last of the O’Boy (powdered chocolate milk) and exclaims, ‘Vad fan håller du på med?!’ (What the hell are you doing?) (0:01:27). When her sister pays no attention...

www.intellectbooks.com 269
and continues eating, she loses her temper and throws the O'Boy container at her, yelling ‘Jag hatar dig!’ (I hate you!), to which her sister replies that she should calm down. This response provokes Elin to pour the milk over her sister’s head, leading to a physical altercation accompanied by a series of mutual insults laced with profanity. The fight breaks up when their mother enters and in exasperation reminds them that she has worked all night, which prompts Elin to apologize for waking her.

The film juxtaposes this scene of white, working-class family life—an overburdened single mom and two seemingly out-of-control daughters fighting over chocolate milk, in non-designer clothes and in an outdated kitchen—with a subsequent breakfast scene that emphasizes tradition and white middle-class domesticity (0:02:16–0:02:57). The scene begins with the refrain of the Swedish ‘Happy Birthday’ song, sung by the parents of the film’s other teenage protagonist, Agnes (0:02:15). Unlike Elin’s mother, who works the night shift and sleep all day, Agnes’ family wakes her by serving her birthday cake in bed, conveying that her parents work normative hours and have the time and money for birthday celebrations. The camera emphasizes the presence of Agnes’ loving father holding a strawberry cake (0:02:35), another classic symbol of Swedish tradition. The atmosphere of harmony presented here is in stark contrast to the chaos of Elin’s family.

These clips introduce beginning language learners to Swedish slang, insults and profanity as well as the traditional Swedish birthday song and birthday food. If the class has acquired vocabulary for emotions and expressing one’s feelings, one possibility is to re-watch a clip during class time and have brief discussions about perceptions of how certain characters appear to feel or react. Students might each be assigned certain emotions and perform a scene in class with different reactions and outcomes. Further exercises might include having students, either on their own or in small groups, write new versions of the clips they viewed. An alternative or additional assignment asks students to compose entirely original scenes that address, say, a birthday party or a family dinner. At more advanced levels, students can view a clip, generate and exchange their own discussion questions in advance, and come to class prepared to run small group discussions.

Students at a more advanced level could also be encouraged to compare and contrast the socio-economic situations of these characters. Contrasting the scenes from Force Majeure with the scenes from Show Me Love would provide an excellent opportunity for class discussion of the differences between these presentations of normative and non-normative kinship arrangements, particularly since the primary narrative in Show Me Love focuses on a non-heteronormative relationship between Elin and Agnes. Such a discussion would also encourage students to problematize pre-conceived stereotypes about Swedish society. Even without understanding all the Swedish dialogue, students can observe and respond to contrasting representations of socio-economic status, gender and sexuality as revealed by starkly opposing images of domestic life.

More than fifteen years have passed since Moodysson’s Show Me Love premiered. Incorporating film clips from another Östlund film, Play (2011), would broaden the topic of kinship, family and socio-economic inequality by introducing their intersectionality with race and migration. The film’s use of racial differentiation in the form of African boys competing with white teenagers for material goods remains extremely problematic and sparked controversy in the Swedish media for what can indeed be considered a racist perspective (for further discussion of the Swedish reception of the film, see...
Stigsdotter 2013). While the film undoubtedly employs racial stereotypes, it also presents scenes that contain unflattering portraits of white corporatized middle class workers and anxieties regarding disconnected and absentee parents. A scene that occurs early in the film (0:10:30–0:12:45) portrays clone-like white corporate workers crowded into the lobby of an office space. Once the business people exit the frame, we see three teenage boys waiting there (0:10:56). One of them has come to his mother’s workplace to get money from her; she sarcastically refers to herself as ‘the cash machine’ (0:11:41). After the boys leave, female workers use cleaning spray to erase a smudged handprint on the lobby windows, emphasizing a symbolic disconnect between adults and children. This message is reinforced by a later scene in which passengers sit silently on a train and refuse to take responsibility for an abandoned cradle left blocking the doors (0:56:00–57:44).

These scenes promote linguistic competencies regarding the acquisition of vocabulary related to occupations and the workplace as well as clothing and public transport (the scene on the train is particularly appropriate with its PA announcements). An intersectional contrast can be made by using a clip that juxtaposes the previous scenes of white conformity, neo-liberal corporatization and absentee parenting with a domestic scene set in the home of an African migrant family (1:34:59–1:36:27). The scene has many levels of complexity, revealing a socio-economic position noticeably more precarious than that of the white office workers as well as a markedly different style of personal interaction. In discussion, beginning students can apply simple descriptive vocabulary related to the family and emotional states, while more advanced conversations – in English outside the classroom for beginners or in Swedish if students have sufficient proficiency – could address issues of race, gender and socio-economic status as contrasted in these scenes.

**MISCONCEPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

To conclude this practicum on the use of film clips in the elementary level language classroom, it may be useful to clarify several common misconceptions:

1. That language instructors must also be film studies experts or have extensive knowledge of the vocabulary of film analysis. While such knowledge is obviously advantageous, it is by no means required to use a brief clip meant to provide competency in vocabulary for the foods served at a birthday celebration. Nor is it particularly complicated to design a follow-up question asking students to compare different foods from their own experiences or, at a more advanced level of linguistic competence, to have them speculate on how socio-economics might affect a family’s ability to purchase and/or provide certain items.

2. That instructors must devote hours to writing new lesson plans around a film clip. Regular updating of lesson plans is good pedagogical practice, but incorporating film clips need not require entirely re-writing the curriculum. All of the clips in the BLC database have been tagged for vocabulary spoken (in dictionary form), for discursive, cultural and linguistic content, and each is accompanied by an audio track slowed down by 50 per cent. Homework assignments that incorporate a clip do not radically alter a lesson plan. In addition, designing small group discussion around a film clip replaces the use of two or three brief but preparation-intensive
activities during a class session and places the emphasis on student engagement and constant use of the language.

- That instructors must be up to date on the most recent films in that language. A clip from an Ingmar Bergman film may be just as useful and relevant as one from a contemporary feature. Authenticity in terms of contemporaneity for students is nevertheless important to consider, particularly when teaching beginning students, although the specific language task is often more relevant and engaging for students than the age of the film.

When incorporating film clips in language instruction, the following recommendations are pertinent. First, the instructor must be familiar with the entire film as well as the particular scene(s). This is simply common sense. The instructor needs to be prepared to answer questions about the characters and how they evolve over the course of the film, to comment on details in the clip(s) that foreshadow future developments and so on. Second, if there are elements in a clip that problematize sensitive or complex issues (race, gender, sexuality, migrant status, socio-economic status), the instructor should prepare a follow-up activity that addresses these issues in a meaningful way without requiring individual students to speak from personal experience or to educate the rest of the class. Third, it is important to consider whether clips with offensive language are appropriate in this context, even if they raise thought-provoking issues.

FILM CLIPS IN THE ADVANCED DANISH CLASSROOM

As we move to examine the use of film clips in the intermediate and advanced language learner classroom, we expand to include other aspects of language learning, specifically intercultural and symbolic competencies. Claire Kramsch defines the latter as follows:

> The ability to manipulate symbolic systems, to interpret signs and their multiple relations to other signs, to use semiotic practices to make and convey meaning, and to position oneself to one’s benefit in the symbolic power game.

(2006)

Further, Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) elaborate on the notion of a distributed symbolic competence, operating in four different ways: subjectivity, historicity, performativity and reframing. What they describe as the nature of engagement in conversation, we extend to an understanding of the meaning of film. One must be aware of the characters’ use of language and gesture to position themselves vis-à-vis other characters in the film (subjectivity); the references to specifics of history and geography (historicity); the perlocutionary effect of language, i.e., the use of language to project or acknowledge power (performativity); and finally, the use of language to reframe the context.

We might use film clips, then, as examples of the symbolic power of language, thereby developing our students’ awareness of this dimension and their own symbolic competence. We take as our model scenes from the Danish TV series Matador (1978–82), a precursor to the British series Downton Abbey (2010–2015), shown in the United States on PBS. According to the description on Radio Denmark’s website:
Matador is a Danish TV series produced and shown between 1978 and 1982. It is set in the fictional Danish town of Korsbæk between 1929 and 1947. It follows the lives of a range of characters from across the social spectrum. […] The series has become part of the modern self-understanding of Danes, partly because of its successful mix of melodrama and […] also not least because of its accurate portrayal of a turbulent Denmark from around the start of the Great Depression and through Nazi Germany’s occupation of Denmark in World War II.

Spoken Danish has always had very exact linguistic markers correlating to geographical and socio-economic belonging. In contrast to other Scandinavian languages, the use of dialect rather than standard Danish (Rigsmaal) has been highly stigmatized, with the various dialects themselves ranked in degrees of prestige and desirability. With this in mind, the wealth of linguistic material in Matador is invaluable. Throughout the 24 episodes there are many examples of sociolects ranging from working- and middle-class to upper-class, with examples of many regional dialects as well, and even a character attempting to imitate a sociolect of a class higher than his own. There are numerous instances of language use between individuals of the same sex but with distinctly different social standings. Language in the series thus reflects the fixed socio-economic categories that characterized Danish society of the period as well as the geographic roots of the characters. Another characteristic feature is that each dialect speaker displays certain behavioural stereotypes typically associated with that particular region. One example is seen in the first clip described below with the speaker of the Funen dialect portrayed as easy-going, friendly and gregarious.

One could argue that the Danish heard in the series aired between 1978–82 sounds old fashioned in 2016. That is a valid argument, since spoken Danish has changed considerably since 1929 and that development has accelerated for various reasons since the early 1980s. Matador attempts to convey the varieties of Danish one could hear over the span of years the story takes place. However, the linguistic mechanisms for class identification and discrimination displayed in the series are still at play today, albeit with some modifications in pronunciation. Students may explore exactly how these mechanisms are presented in Matador by analysing how each character is imbued with markers of belonging to a certain class. For example, the railway worker reads a particular political paper, is dressed according to his occupation, eats a certain diet, speaks in a specific sociolect and interacts with other characters in ways that signal his standing and class. As a next step students could schematize these data and see how other characters compare.

Even if the linguistic markers of 2016 have changed to some degree, undercurrents of these systems still survive, and an advanced learner of Danish would gain much in recognizing this. An understanding of the socio-economic and historical markers evident in Matador would sensitize students to the context in which a Danish speech act takes place today. Let us examine the activities we might employ to develop this sensitivity, taking two clips from Matador found in the LFLFC as examples.

‘At the Railroad Restaurant’ (Matador, Episode 1, 0:3:10–0:4:06). We are introduced to four of the main characters: the bartender, Boldt; Larsen (who comes in); Lauritz Jensen, aka Røde (Red) and a friend, ‘Fede’ (Chubby). The camera pans from focusing on the newspaper, Korsbæk Social-Demokraten
(with a working-class readership) to Røde, who is perusing it, to the restaurant interior. The conversational tone between Røde and Fede is friendly and teasing, albeit a bit sarcastic. The use of these nicknames adds to the feeling of camaraderie. We get the feeling that this scene takes place every day and that everyone knows his role both within the group and in society.

The following elements of class distinction and socio-economic standings are present in the clip and can be discussed in detail in class: Each character is dressed in the ‘uniform’ of his occupation and societal standing: the bartender in a white shirt and black vest, Fede in white painter’s gear, Larsen in a chauffeur’s uniform with a cap and Røde in blue working man’s attire. Fede and Boldt speak neutral standard Danish, while Larsen has a Funen dialect (with the connotations mentioned above) and Røde has a Copenhagen/low standard Danish sociolect. The speech type each character has been assigned in the storyline also aligns with the character of the person. The version of neutral standard Danish heard here uses the formal ‘De’ (you) as a normal marker between people who are not well-acquainted or between speakers of different social standings.

We know that it is 12:30p.m. Fede and Larsen can afford to buy their main meal of the day and order a plate of hot food and a beer and/or a dram, i.e., a shot of aquavit, but Røde eats open-faced sandwiches, brought from home in brown paper, with a beer. Drinking alcohol mid-day seems to be the usual practice – even for the chauffeur. At one point all the characters gaze out the window and see the bank CEO and his wife driving a fancy car, dressed in a business suit and fur coat respectively. Some comments suggest disdain towards the CEO and his family. When Boldt, Røde and Fede talk about them their voices have an ironic tone. Larsen does not speak here, instead remaining non-committal and easy-going.

The instructor might begin by having the students do background reading on Denmark in the 1920s and look at pictures of how people were dressed according to their work at the time. Students could be asked to compare and contrast what they learn about Denmark to their own country during the same period. As Denmark’s socio-economic situation aligns nicely with the United States in the late 1920s, students should be able to relate. In class a discussion on historical food habits can take place, with mention of the alcohol habits that are displayed in the clip. Another task in class could be listing who says what to whom and with what tone and discussing whether the way they address each other has something to do with their individual standings. Another focal point could be to discuss the change in tone when the affluent couple appears. What changes in the conversation that signals a shift from ‘just us’ to ‘us versus them’? A post-viewing exercise might ask students to think of contemporary public figures in Denmark and the United States and how their speech marks their socio-economic status and level of education. Finally, moving beyond analysis, students might perform this scene, or write their own scene with class markers, drawing on what they have learned here. For more ideas on developing symbolic competence, see Kaiser and Shibahara (2014).

‘Going to the Bank’ (Matador, Episode 2, 0:8:25–0:10:25). In this clip, we are introduced to Mads Andersen-Skjern (MAS), who is the Matador, the newcomer (also a widower with a young son, whom he brings along to the bank to give him a ‘life lesson’), who is perceived as an uppity entrepreneur in this provincial town. He goes to the bank to get a loan to expand his business. Everyone in the clip speaks upper-class standard Danish, although it would...
have been more realistic if MAS had spoken with a Northern Jutlandic dialect, since he has recently arrived from there. One stereotype connected especially with a northern Jutlandic background is that of the wheeler-dealer; the MAS character exhibits this trait, but his language does not mark the geographic and dialectical background.

In the scene we see the power of the bank versus everyman. Much of the power is expressed not in what is said, but rather through gestures, intonations, silences and facial expressions. In this bank scene the class conflict is played out between the establishment, represented by several bank employees, and MAS, whom the bank perceives as an outsider and therefore a threat to the status quo. MAS’s request is so unsettling to the bank that he keeps getting shuffled from clerk to clerk in the system until in the end he demands to speak with the bank’s CEO, who ‘happens to be unavailable’. Just when he is told so an upper-class woman rushes in, demanding to see the CEO, and is escorted directly to his office – all while MAS has to wait his turn. The clip presents a classic example of institutional power exerted over the individual.

The instructor might ask students what values are being expressed in this clip and how they came to that conclusion, i.e., how did they read the gestures and the silences? Then one might have them speculate on how those ideas could be expressed in language by asking them to create a dialogue where they have to relate what has transpired, thereby verbalizing these unspoken meanings. This goes beyond interpretation and develops students’ symbolic competence through a reframing of the original context.

CONCLUSION

A language curriculum with a robust filmic component benefits not only students’ acquisition of the language; the experience of working with a film clip will pay dividends in literature classes and courses in film studies. Incorporating film into the curriculum supplements materials found in textbooks or outside readings. It broadens students’ awareness of the differences and similarities of the target culture, both culture in a broad sense and the specific film culture of the target language, whether it is done through the LFLFC or through other tools such as YouTube.

In this article we have attempted to show how film clips may be used in the foreign language classroom to develop not only students’ linguistic skills, but also to deepen their awareness of Scandinavian culture and how language is used as a symbolic system. We have shown that using film to teach language does require some modification to the curriculum, but with tools such as the LFLFC, this need not be an onerous task.

REFERENCES


Forchini, Pierfranca (2012), Movie Language Revisited: Evidence from Multi-Dimensional Analysis and Corpora, Bern: Peter Lang AG.


Kramsch, Claire (2009), The Multilingual Subject: What Foreign Language Learners Say about their Experience and Why it Matters, Oxford: Oxford University Press.


Matador (1978–82, Denmark: Nordisk Film).


**FILM AND TELEVISION REFERENCES**

Balling, Erik, Matador (1978–82), Denmark.


**SUGGESTED CITATION**


**CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS**

Christian Gullette is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Berkeley, in Scandinavian Languages and Literatures with a focus on contemporary Swedish literature and film. He is the winner of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies’ 2015 Aurora Borealis Prize for best graduate student presentation in the Languages and Literature category.

Contact: E-mail: cmgullette@berkeley.edu

Mark Kaiser serves as the associate director of the Berkeley Language Center. He is the project director of the Library of Foreign Language Film
Clips. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in Slavic Linguistics.

Contact:
E-mail: mkaiser@berkeley.edu

Karen Møller serves as UC Berkeley’s Nordic languages’ coordinator in the Department of Scandinavian and as lecturer of Danish. She received her Cand.Phil. in nordic philology from the University of Copenhagen.

Contact:
E-mail: kmoller@berkeley.edu

Christian Gullette, Mark Kaiser and Karen Møller have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the authors of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.