

TEACHING FILM OR USING FILM TO LEARN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE? DIVERSE APPROACHES TO TEACHING FILM IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTRES

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Films in foreign language classrooms are commonly used for developing students' linguistic and cultural competences. This approach, which suits certain educational contexts, particularly those of community or government organizations which cater for the general public, is not entirely suitable for learning at university. In China (and Hong Kong), Spanish is mainly taught at university as a foreign language degree. Students of Hispanic Film can learn how to analyze a film both as a text and a cultural product in the target language. Therefore, when learning Spanish and Latin American Film as part of a Spanish undergraduate degree at university, the development of linguistic and cultural competences can be integrated with the development of creative and critical thinking skills as well as the capacity for film and cultural analysis. This paper offers a discussion of the motives for such inclusion from an interdisciplinary approach and a practical example.

KEY WORDS: foreign language learning, film analysis, cultural studies, interdisciplinary approach, university language program

¿La enseñanza del cine o el uso del cine en el aprendizaje de la lengua y la cultura? Distintos enfoques para la enseñanza del cine en centros dedicados a las lenguas extranjeras

El uso del cine en clases de lenguas extranjeras suele estar enfocado al desarrollo de las competencias lingüística y cultural del estudiante. Este enfoque, que es apropiado para ciertos contextos educativos, especialmente centros comunitarios u organizaciones gubernamentales que ofrecen servicios al público general, no es enteramente adecuado para el aprendizaje a nivel universitario. En China (y Hong Kong) el español se aprende mayoritariamente como carrera universitaria de lenguas extranjeras. Los estudiantes de cine español e hispanoamericano pueden aprender a analizar una película como texto y como producto cultural en la lengua meta. De esta forma, cuando se aprende cine español e hispanoamericano como parte de una carrera universitaria, la adquisición de las competencias lingüística y cultural se puede integrar al desarrollo de la creatividad y las capacidades de pensamiento crítico y de análisis fílmico y cultural. Este artículo presenta las

razones que justifican esta inclusión desde un punto de vista interdisciplinar y ofrece un ejemplo práctico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, análisis fílmico, estudios culturales, enfoque interdisciplinar, programa universitario de lenguas

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This article deals with the dilemmas faced by teachers who use films to teach in foreign language programs at the tertiary level. Using the case of a Hispanic Film course at Hong Kong University (HKU) as the basis for my analysis, I will put forward a number of questions which materialised in the process of designing this particular course with regard to the learner, the educational context and the course learning objectives. After careful reflection on my experiences, I contend that it is necessary to combine two approaches: (1) using film as a means for learning a language and culture; and (2) approaching film and culture as discourses to be analysed.

1. THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The particular educational environment where the academic program will be offered is one of the main factors to take into account before deciding the teaching approach. The first challenging characteristic of a film course included in a foreign language program is its medium of instruction. In the case which occupies us here –a Hispanic Film course at HKU –the medium of instruction is Spanish, a language that students are still learning. I believe that this is not an isolated case. Many students around the world study in a language that is not their native language or even a language they master. This is also the case in China and Hong Kong, where many students who are not always proficient in English study their university subjects in English. For this reason, I hope that the reflections originated by this case help teachers working in similar situations decide the approach that better suits their students and their school.

Even though Spanish has been taught at HKU for more than fifteen years, the Spanish Major was first offered at the university in 2006, which is relatively late when compared to other Asian universities, such as those in Taiwan, Beijing and Korea. This move corresponds to an increasing demand for Spanish Studies in Hong Kong. As detailed elsewhere¹, in the last decade Hong Kong has experienced a growing demand for Spanish Studies which has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of teachers and students of Spanish. Unlike China, most of the teachers working in Hong Kong are Spanish, perhaps due to the fact that the Agency for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AECID) sends several “lectores” or

¹ See “El creciente interés por el español en Hong Kong” (“The growing interest for the Spanish language in Hong Kong”) in *El Español en el Mundo. Anuario del Instituto Cervantes* 2004, pp. 407-422.

Visiting Language Instructors every year to universities in China (three of which to Hong Kong), some of whom reside in Hong Kong after the expiry of their three-year contracts. The Hispanic Film and Literature course is offered among other courses with a focus on language and culture, such as Spanish Language, Cultures of Spain and Spanish America, Phonetics, English/Spanish Translation, Writing Skills and Spanish for Business courses.

As regards linguistic competence, it is safe to say that a Major in Spanish offered in a country where the majority of students do not study Spanish until they enter university, is fundamentally different from a Major in Spanish offered by a university located in a region where Spanish is widely used outside of that university. Such students would generally be much more familiar with the Spanish language before beginning their formal studies of Spanish at university (compare Hong Kong/Beijing with California/London). Thus, in a place like Hong Kong, where students have little or no knowledge of Spanish or Spanish speaking cultures before entering university, a considerable amount of time is devoted to learning the language and the cultures associated with it.

Therefore, it is no surprise that film courses which are part of language Major programs (other than English) taught in Hong Kong have been conceived of as film-themed language courses rather than film courses. This conception implies that there are inherent limitations as to what students are capable of learning in the course. I will illustrate one of these limitations with an example. Some years ago, I used to teach a course on Hispanic Literature which was open to most undergraduates, not only those majoring in Spanish. Since the medium of instruction was English (one of the official languages of Hong Kong) I either used texts in English or provided translations in English; here the level of linguistic difficulty of the texts was not an issue. Students taking the course had to read a number of Borges' short stories characterized by their crypticism, ambiguity and baroque style. This cannot be a required component of a 3rd year course whose medium of instruction is only Spanish.

Students taking the Hispanic Film course in year-3 of the Spanish Major program are at a B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, abbreviated as CEFR. At this level, students, described as "independent learners" at a "threshold" level within this framework

can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. (CEFR, p. 24)

To have a clear idea of what students at this level can do, it is also useful to look into their expected abilities in the following level, B2, where students

can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. (CEFR, p. 24)

If I were guided exclusively by this useful framework for teaching languages, I would have to limit my speech and the student's expected discourse in the target language as well as the learning materials to the matters specified above for level B1. In other words, it would be necessary to avoid "technical discussions in the field of specialisation".

It is at this point that I find that the fact of the language being taught at a university makes a great difference if educators of foreign languages other than English become aware of the difference between teaching a language Major at a university and teaching the language at private language schools or institutions like the Cervantes Institute, L'Alliance Française or the Confucius Institute, to name a few. Most teachers who use film in a context where learning the target language is the main objective have no doubt that the aim is to learn language and culture and do not consider that they need to be experts in Film Studies in order to teach these courses.

In fact, to situate this discussion in a broader context, the whole issue of teaching a specific subject like Film in a language other than English or Chinese at Hong Kong University is somehow related to the issue of "the end of knowledge in higher education", borrowing from Ronald Barnett and Anne Griffin (1997). Are we preparing our students for a job? Are we educating independent thinkers that will also produce knowledge and lead their society, or workers well trained to find jobs as merchandisers and translators in the context of the global market? I found myself at a crossroads when designing this course and my dilemma coincides with some of the Chinese scholars of Spanish who gathered at the First Meeting of Teachers of Spanish organized by the Cervantes Institute in Beijing in June 2008. Renowned scholars such as Professor Liu Jian of The University of Foreign Studies in Beijing are worried about the trend towards an exclusively vocational training practice in foreign language departments at tertiary level.

Another factor that must be taken into account in this discussion is teacher development and motivation. This question is related to the existing distinction between professoriate staff and language instructors at HKU and other institutions. The possibility of language instructors becoming full academic staff is linked to their academic performance, understood as essentially different to language teaching. Similarly, improving the "academic" profile of courses offered in foreign language centres has the potential of transforming centres that so far have been tacitly regarded as "service" units into "academic" departments. This could in turn result in teacher motivation.

2. A SURVEY (BOOKS, SYLLABI AND TEACHING MATERIALS)

To illustrate how common the "use of film to teach language and culture" approach is when teaching film in a foreign language teaching context, I will evaluate some courses taught and the teaching materials used at different universities. This survey includes examples from Bahasa Indonesian, English and Spanish language programs in such places as distant as Singapore, U.K., U.S., Spain as well as those on the www.

In her paper with the self-explanatory title, “The usage of films as an innovative way to enhance language learning and cultural understanding”, Johanna W. Istanto (2008: 253) describes the various uses made of films in Bahasa Indonesian courses offered at the National University of Singapore. She argues that the use of movies in the language class serves “to motivate students’ interest in learning, to make the lesson more interesting and to nurture students’ understanding of the target culture.” The reasons given for choosing certain films clearly belong to linguistic and cultural acquisition fields as do the following examples:

- “it gives an exposure to the usage of colloquial words by the Indonesian youth living in Jakarta”;
- “the film gives an exposure to the different ways of life of the rich and poor living in the capital city of Jakarta”; and
- “students are able to learn about matriarchal law which governs the Minang” (p. 254).

Although the use of film in Spanish as a foreign language teaching has a long tradition, there has been a significant surge in the number of publications devoted to the use of audiovisuals in the Spanish as a Foreign Language (ELE) classroom in the past few years. These teaching materials reflect the practice outlined above. Here is a brief description of a selected number of them:

1. *De cine. Fragmentos cinematográficos para el aula ELE* (Santos Gargallo, I. y Santos Gargallo, A. 2001)
This textbook focuses on the acquisition of linguistic, cultural and (implicitly) strategic competences. Two of its best features are that many of the films chosen introduce slang and that there is a significant number of role play activities that aid the internalization of culture (what Davos (2002) calls “silent culture”).
2. *Explotación didáctica de Flores de otro mundo and Samy y yo* (Lerner 2008)
The intended outcomes and methods of this series of workbooks are very similar to the previous one. There are some exercises devoted to script writing, without reflection on the characteristics of the language of the script.
3. *S de simulación* (Roldán, forthcoming)
This is one of the most innovative workbooks. Through a global simulation approach, students become familiar with the process of film-making. The tasks are intended to help students create their own film. Analytical and experiential skills are put to work.
4. *Activities with film in MarcoELE*
Most of the activities posted in this otherwise excellent website do not include film analysis or any activity that helps change students’ perceptions and attitudes about the role of film and film-makers in society or the potential of film-makers to influence the world.

In a different geographical and educational context, in his book *English Teaching and the Moving Image*, Andrew Goodwyn (2004: 20) justifies the statutory inclusion of media teaching –including film– in English classes at secondary level (as prescribed

by the British National Curriculum of 1989 and 2000) in these terms: “English will need to be the curriculum focus for teaching about how the moving image works just as it strives to teach how language works and how specialized forms of language, like novels and poems, ‘work’.” Since this practice is done in a native-language educational setting, it may seem unsuitable for the present discussion of the role of film teaching in foreign language settings. But Goodwyn establishes a distinction between a ‘cultural heritage’ and a ‘cultural analysis’ model within the context of traditional native language and literature teaching that can be equally applicable to foreign language teaching. According to him, “a ‘Cultural Heritage’ view emphasizes the responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of those works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language [whereas] a ‘Cultural Analysis’ view emphasizes the role of English in helping children towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which they live” (p. 9). Despite Goodwyn’s defence of cultural analysis in native language learning contexts, there are scholars such as John Golden (2001) who prefer to simply use “film as a tool in the English classroom”.

In both first and foreign language teaching at tertiary level it is possible to move beyond understanding film as a means to better learn the language and the high and popular cultures associated with that language towards film analysis as performed in the field of cultural studies. Many university teachers of Spanish in the U.S. are already aware of the need to pay attention to print and visual literacies in the way described by Teresa Fernández Ulloa (2007: 16-17):

We think that in the 21st Century it is very important to have the ability to communicate competently in all media forms, print and electronic, as well as to understand, analyze and evaluate the powerful images, words and sounds that make up our contemporary mass media culture. These skills of media literacy are essential for both children and adults as individuals and as citizens of a democratic society.

In the description of her course “Spanish and Latin American Cinema and Society, and Film Language”, offered at CSUB (California State University, Bakersfield), there is no reference to cultural analysis, though.

Another American scholar interested in the use/study of films, Freda Mishan (2005: 227) seems to advance from Fernández Ulloa’s position in her book *Designing Authenticity into Language Learning Materials*. Here, she foregrounds questions of cultural analysis omitted by Fernández Ulloa, as she points out that “if film is handled via a content-based approach, however, it becomes far more accessible, with elements of affective engagement, response and cultural analysis taking precedence over comprehension of the language input.” Her proposed model of cultural analysis includes discussions of film adaptation of other texts, and analysis of changes of cultural attitudes. However, this has to be understood within the general approach that prioritizes the language learning process, as the title of her book clearly indicates. Unlike Fernández Ulloa, who teaches film as a main aim of her course, Mishan still uses the film to learn language, albeit rather profoundly. Both scholars offer interesting approaches, but fail to fully integrate language study and cultural analysis.

Finally, it may be argued that it is possible for teachers in the U.S. to explore the teaching of film in language programs to this admirable degree because Spanish is the second language in the U.S. and students who Major in Spanish in the U.S. generally have a higher level of proficiency than their counterparts in Asia. Despite the differences in the level of proficiency and social relevance of Spanish in the U.S. and East Asia, I think that Spanish and Hispanic Majors in Asia should also attempt to change their traditional approach. The “use” of film to learn other things in East Asia can be transformed into an approach which views film both as a tool to learn language and as a tool for or object of cultural studies.

3. COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

I will now demonstrate how this can be done by describing the process of designing the learning outcomes of the Hispanic Film course at HKU in more detail. The preparation of this course started with a question about the nature of cinema. Since many types of media are used to teach languages, it is useful to start by distinguishing what constitutes cinema when compared to other audiovisual texts. ‘Audiovisual’ is an adjective especially referring to teaching methods in which electrical equipment is used². Most commercials and TV programs, instructional videos, materials to be used in the language class, and films, among others, are audiovisual texts. And although there are volumes devoted to defining the term ‘cinema’, in simple terms it denotes “the production of films as an art or industry”³.

The keyword that distinguishes cinema from other kinds of audiovisuals is “art”. A film can serve to learn a language and, usually, also contains cultural information about a society where the target language is spoken that can be used to learn/teach culture. It is known that learning the language is best done when the learner also acquires (inter)cultural competence. At this point, it must be noted the reoccurrence in publications of the comment on the beneficial effects of using film for teaching culture because films supposedly reproduce real life situations. As Davos (2002: 64) puts it:

Real-life contexts, as provided in films, allow for a social framework for students to learn about the target culture and informal language system before they venture forth to engage in communicative activities with the target culture either in their own communities or abroad.

This idea needs to be limited or explained. If we followed it to the letter, students of Spanish who at some point of their studies often use Pedro Almodóvar’s films for learning, on their first visit to Spain would expect to find the streets populated by eccentric characters such as drag queens and would be surprised to note that the population in big Spanish cities behave in similar ways to the population of Hong

² Definition of the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*.

³ Definition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Kong. The question of realism in cinema is a long debated question, but basically, it should be understood that the reality of a film has been created by the director in collaboration with other crew members who stand from a particular point of view, and is not the reality itself. Despite this, I agree with Davos that films are an excellent tool for introducing culture in the foreign language classroom and for making students not only understand it analytically but also experience it if it is meant to be experienced.

Apart from these observations on the acquisition of linguistic and cultural competence, the fact that cinema is an art implies that the audiovisual text itself is a cultural product that has been created in a given time, space, by a given personality that is leaving or has left an imprint in the global cultural arena, and this team or individual has produced a film using a code, techniques and principles, consciously or not. These observations may misguide the reader to believe that film here is taught as “cultural heritage”. There is room for integrating a component of film history, in the same way that popular culture is studied, but what I would like to highlight here is the fact that films allow for the study of features that are not usually encountered in audiovisual materials specifically designed to learn a foreign language. For instance, it is easier to work with students on a choice of form that contributes to a certain effect in the former than the latter, i.e. film analysis can be fully developed when there is an artistic intention on the author’s part.

After enquiring about the nature and potential of cinema, I asked myself:

1. How do I want to use cinema in this course?
2. In what context is the course offered?
3. What type of students do I have?

These questions are obviously interrelated. In this case, the course is taught in a university setting, as a subject of a Major program, therefore the student body is quite homogeneous. Students’ age, educational background and interests are very similar when compared to those of students taking continuing education courses at the same university, not to mention institutions like the British Council or the Cervantes Institute, where students are of very diverse types.

The context also affects the use of cinema. As seen above, the two main possibilities here are:

- cinema is used to learn the language and culture;
- cinema is an object of study in itself and serves cultural studies.

To give a complete idea of the incredible potential of teaching film in a university foreign language setting, the following table contains a whole range of possible learning outcomes for such a course, some of which will be discussed here.

Table 1. Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcomes	Teaching/Learning Methods	Assessment	University Level Outcomes
<p>Improve linguistic competence (grammar and four skills).</p>	<p>Eclectic approach, including communicative approach, inquiry-based approach and “teacher-lecturing” approach among others. Manipulate cinematographic texts to practice grammar and skills. Expose students to models of expression and interaction. Model imitation. Creation of students’ own filmic texts.</p>	<p>Assess progress in the use of grammar and skills. Capacity for interacting in situations that are similar to the ones existing in the models presented during the course.</p>	<p>Provide students with the necessary resources to learn foreign languages in order for them to be able to manage in multilingual contexts.</p>
<p>Improve cultural competence.</p>	<p>Expose students to texts that are useful for the study of high and popular culture. Oral presentations on the cultural content represented on films. Write essays comparing cultures. Role-plays of possible situations in target culture.</p>	<p>Assess comprehension of the cultural values discussed during the course. Assess capacity to interact adequately in cultural contexts that are similar to those discussed in the course.</p>	<p>Develop intercultural competence. Take economic, social and cultural aspects of languages into account. Develop critical thinking skills. Develop capacity for critical self-reflection and greater understanding of others.</p>

Learn how to use good learning strategies.	Help students to actively discover diverse analytical and learning strategies. Identify which strategies suit best different learning objectives.	Assess use of good learning strategies.	Develop critical thinking skills. Promote long-life learning and transferable skills.
Learn to perform a basic film analysis.	Provide students with basic tools for film analysis.	Assess students' capacity to use the film analysis tools.	Promote students' creativity and capacity for innovation.
Perceptions and attitudes: improve students' perception of film as a tool to learn as well as an artistic and cultural product.	Contextualize texts in their sociocultural and historical context.	Check students' change of perception through a global or detailed assessment.	Promote students' creativity and capacity for innovation. Promote leadership and advocacy for the improvement of the human condition.

The column “Learning Outcomes” includes some of the outcomes that the University of Hong Kong expects to achieve through courses taught at this university. The other three columns include only the outcomes, methods and assessment of the particular course that is object of these reflections. These outcomes are divided into linguistic (1), cultural (2) and strategic (3) competences, film analysis (4) and perceptions and attitudes (5) related to the film production. Some of the outcomes in the last column are repeated because that column contains the university's outcomes that are expected by working on each of these five sections. The first three outcomes (1-3) are usually the focus of teachers who use film in the foreign language classroom, and the last two (4-5) are not so common –especially in settings where students are not proficient in Spanish– even at university level.

In the following section, I will exemplify the integration of all the skills discussed above with a material designed for this course.

4. A UNIT

The practical example that follows will serve to illustrate what has been explained previously. This unit on “Narratives of War and Colonization” described here serves to integrate different approaches. It aims at helping students understand how narratives

of war and colonization are constructed. For this purpose, the Spanish film *Alatriste*, the Cuban film *The Last Supper*, and other literary, pictorial and journalistic texts and essays are discussed. The films were chosen for their cultural content and their capacity to engage students in critical-thinking discussions.

Alatriste is set at a time when Spain was losing its empire. It is based on some popular novels by the Spanish writer Arturo Pérez Reverte. Captain Alatriste participates in battles waged by the Spanish Empire in Flanders to maintain its supremacy. Despite the efforts of anonymous “heroes” like him, who fight to defend the rights of the corrupt elite, the Empire is in clear decline. Figures like the Baroque poet Quevedo and infamous institutions like the Inquisition appear in the film. In fact, *Alatriste* introduces students to a key moment in the history of Spain that still influences the way in which Spaniards see themselves nowadays. It is an excellent pretext for discussing what is implied in the image of the hero when it is associated to the support for a war such as the conquest of America by the Spanish troops or the ones that are currently being waged in the Middle East. As there is some historical information that students need to know before watching the film in order to understand it better, a lot of attention is paid to high culture competence at the beginning of the unit.

The Last Supper is a film by Cuban filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea about the reenactment of the last supper of Christ and his disciples by the owner of a plantation and twelve of his slaves. After creating false expectations of improvement of the slaves’ condition, slaves’ protests are severely repressed and end with the decapitation of eleven of the twelve slaves who had been invited to dinner by the Count who owns the plantation and sugar mill. This film offers a diametrically opposite image of the Spanish conquistadors and colonizers to that offered in *Alatriste*.

The activities related to these films and other texts are organized into three groups: pre-viewing, while-viewing and post-viewing activities. Here follows some excerpts of these teaching materials.

4.1. Pre-viewing activities

In groups, students prepare a short oral presentation on one of these four topics:

- The History of Spain in the 17th century
- The Literature of Spain in the same period (Quevedo)
- The Spanish Baroque, especially in painting (Velázquez)
- The Inquisition

Once the students have presented their works in class, they start to work with the film by doing a prediction and warming-up exercise with the front cover of the DVD. Students have to try to guess the identity of the man in the front cover and the genre of the film. Immediately afterwards, students work with the opening sequence. They are asked to focus on the use of the camera movement. At the very beginning of the film, there is an introductory sequence that starts with the following image of a map and the camera zooming in slowly until only Flanders is seen.

There is a voice-over narration which students will not be able to hear at this point because the aim of this activity is to let them focus on the camera movement and what this device may signify. When only Flanders can be seen, a dissolve introduces a man that is presented as a hero. Flanders is the territory where Spain was fighting one of its bitter wars at the time. This camera movement manages to express in less than a minute a main theme of the film: what to be a hero means when the empire is in danger; the greatness of the Spanish talent at the same time that the Spanish Empire was disintegrating; the Baroque combination of light and darkness. With this exercise, students are made aware of the importance of the filmic language from the outset. Later on, they can watch the sequence again while listening to the narration that accompanies the camera movement in order to better perceive the adequacy of the camera movement to the words.

Other activities designed for these pre-viewing phase include reading and listening comprehension exercises, and activities to learn grammar in use and improve the oral skills. Here follows an example:

Table 2. Example of oral activity

<p>¿Cómo se cuenta algo sin decir quién te ha informado en tu lengua? En castellano hay varios recursos para hacerlo. Mira el siguiente fragmento de la película e indica qué expresiones se usan en este sentido (Ver principio del tercer capítulo del DVD, minutos 0:17:25-0:18:20).</p>	
<p><u>Guión. Principio del tercer capítulo del DVD, minutos 0:17:25-0:18:20</u></p> <p>A: Alatríste, I: Íñigo</p> <p>A. ¿Qué te pasa, Íñigo? Parece que hayas visto un fantasma.</p> <p>I. Dicen que el príncipe inglés sufrió una emboscada.</p> <p>A. Vaya, ¿y se sabe quién se la tendió?</p> <p>I. Dicen que unos ladrones.</p> <p>A. Es que la gente tiene mucha imaginación. Anda, ve a por vino.</p>	
<p><u>Así lo contamos</u></p> <p>Se dice que...</p> <p>Dicen que...</p> <p>He oído que...</p> <p>La gente dice que...</p>	<p><u>Y así reaccionamos</u></p> <p>¡No me digas!</p> <p>¿De verdad?</p> <p>¡¿Qué? No me lo puedo creer!</p> <p>¡Increíble!</p> <p>Estás de broma, ¿no?</p>

Ahora, ve por la clase y cuéntales tú algo sorprendente a tus compañeros pero recuerda, no digas quién te lo ha contado. Si no tienes ideas sorprendentes, tu profesor/a te dará alguna.

Students identify the structures used in Spanish when one wants to avoid mentioning the agent of an action. After completing this task, they have to go around the class telling other students surprising news using the expressions learnt, and their counterparts will react according to the instructions given by the teacher.

There is no limitation as to the type of activities that one can design to practice a particular skill, as far as the teacher has a clear idea of the aim of each activity. One type that is particularly entertaining for students consists in writing the script of a short clip that is shown without sound. In *Alatriste*, there is one scene where a young woman falls in love with a boy in the street. She causes an accident and he helps her. It is easy to guess what the actors are saying. Students need to write it down and check afterwards against the film whether their guess was right or not. It is very funny and motivating having students read their scripts in class while playing the scene without sound.

Some of these pre-viewing activities require that students watch short clips of the movie but these are still considered pre-viewing activities because they precede the viewing of the whole movie that will be done outside the classroom, and because they prepare them to understand the larger piece. As is observed in the examples provided, the degree of teacher control of the students' performance decreases gradually.

4.2. Activities to further prepare for the viewing and for the first stage post-viewing exercises

At this point, students learn about basic film language, such as camera movement, lighting, sound and editing. I chose to teach it in the form of a lecture with a theoretical part plus a practical component. In the practical or "experiential" part students produce a short digital story. Depending on the resources available, this can be done using free software such as Windows Movie Maker and iMovie or professional software such as Final Cut Pro, among others. Students shoot their own clips or take photos and edit a short film, in order to learn by experiencing what they have supposedly learnt in lectures. They can also write a film review at the end of this process.

4.3. Post-viewing activities

In the activities previously described, students have used films to learn Spanish and also film language. These activities increase motivation and help improve linguistic and analytical skills. Finally, there is room for introducing cultural analysis in the way it is performed in the field of cultural studies. In this unit that serves as an example, students have to read an article by the prominent Spanish writer and philosopher Francisco Ayala about the use of sex scenes in films in order to judge how they have been used in this particular film. They also have to discuss the future of History as an academic

discipline and, for that purpose, they have to compare articles written by Chinese and Spanish writers and express their own opinions on the matter. Furthermore, the comparison between *Alatriste*, on the one hand, and *The Last Supper* (the Cuban film) together with Flemish paintings serves to discuss the contemporary idea of the conquistador as a hero. The hero is rendered differently in the film *Alatriste* and in Flemish paintings and Cuban films that serve to criticize the cruel wars waged by Spain in the XIV century and its ensuing colonization in the case of Latin America.

5. CONCLUSION

In sum, although some learning outcomes such as development of critical-thinking skills or the capacity for cultural analysis are often excluded from the teaching of film in university foreign language classroom, they should be incorporated into an interdisciplinary academic program at university level. Here I explain that it is advisable to pay attention to higher-order thinking skills, even when the language ability of students is still rather limited. This is motivating not only for students, but also for teachers, who see their role as educators within a wider academic context enhanced.

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