

Audiovisual materials as tools to teach English as a Foreign Language at tertiary level

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we propose a learning approach based on the use of cinema, including film-related computing applications as a teaching resource with the aim of introducing some specialized contents in the class of English as a foreign language. The proposal outlined here is addressed to tertiary level studies, and this means B2 and C1 levels. The use of specific film fragments would have more attractive and motivating lessons so as to promote the students' autonomy and proficiency in English as a second language. First, we will present a short theoretical framework, and then, our learning proposal is offered, and this promotes the development of specific competences such as the linguistic and communicative competences, the digital competence and the cultural awareness of the students. A sample set of activities using cinema as the main didactic tool is also included. In this case, activities proposed revolve around the figure of Elizabeth I, as much film material is available, and we are likely to find specific portions of texts to improve students' proficiency of the language.

Keywords: cinema, didactics, language learning, EFL

1. INTRODUCTION

Current teaching methodologies need to sort out easier ways to let students understand new information. In this realm, new approaches and methods in teaching English as a second language (ESL) in tertiary level are required to interact with these students. Sometimes it is hard for lecturers to find a way to motivate their students and to present them the contents on a captivating and appealing format. That is the reason why we propose the use of a format to which the students are used to dealing with, such as the audio-visual materials, for example. In our proposal we focus our attention basically on the use of cinema as a didactic tool. Cinema can be used not only to teach languages but also different cultural dimensions i.e. history, literature, etc. It is a valuable resource which has been frequently underrated by professionals of the educational field, though, it seems that nowadays there is a tendency to introduce the use of these materials at tertiary level, as many mobile and computer applications allow for the customization of film clips with a teaching and learning scope.

Many lecturers and scholars tend to consider that audio-visual materials arouse the students' interest for the topics studied in class. However, these materials should not be used indistinctively and indiscriminately. There are some conditions that need to be met, if we want them to promote meaningful learning i.e. guide the students through the material. This means that they are able to analyse the materials presented critically rather than to use a whole film. Another one of these conditions is language and contents adequacy, and so we are compelled to select the most relevant fragments to illustrate the subject we want our students to practise, learn and know. In what follows, we present a proposal for the study of sixteenth century language, culture and literature at university level. The language level of the students addressed is B2 or C1 depending on whether they are students at their first years or their last years in which courses dealing with 16th-century English language, culture and literature are distributed. The activities proposed revolve around the figure of Elizabeth I, as much film material is available, and we are likely to find specific portions of texts to improve students' proficiency of the language.

2. THEORETICAL MATERIAL IN ESL AND THE AUDIOVISUAL REPRESENTATION OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL DATA

In this section, we outline some aspects concerning sixteenth-century England, and this is fundamental to understand our proposal, which aims at combining technologies facilities and standard contents in English studies as a second language at tertiary level. The sixteenth century in England was defined by Elizabeth I's reign. She is one of the historical personages most well-known of the British history. The most debated matters during Elizabeth's sovereignty were her marriage and succession. There were many reasons why Elizabeth never married. It is quite clear that she did not like the idea of relinquishing her power. However, she might have accepted a marriage for diplomatic reasons. Parliament was always pressing her to choose a husband and at the beginning of her reign, she seemed to consider her different suitors, and by doing this, she kept some of the male rulers of Europe from attacking England. Finally, she decided not to marry; according to *The Oxford Dictionary of Political Quotations*¹ she said: "I have already joined myself in marriage to a husband, namely, the Kingdom of England."

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This response would have been considered a setback for any queen in the sixteenth century since to have heirs to the throne was one of their duties, but Elizabeth and her government portrayed her unmarried state as a personal sacrifice that the Queen made for her kingdom. From that moment onwards a new national identity was created and the cult to *The Virgin Queen* was instituted.

Elizabeth's decision to remain unmarried led directly to the question of her succession to what her answer was "So long as I live, I shall be Queen of England. When I am dead they shall succeed me who have the most right." (Thomas 1998: 119)².

This response was the most reasonable one because to affirm that Mary Stuart had the right to be the successor to the English throne would have been a great threat to Elizabeth's life. A parallelism can be established between this situation and the one between Elizabeth and her sister Mary Tudor. In both cases, Elizabeth embodied the Protestant faith while her sister, Mary Tudor, and her cousin, Mary Stuart, embodied the Catholic faith. Elizabeth was conscious of this situation; she knew that "As second in the kingdom, the Queen of Scots would inevitably become, as she herself had become during her predecessor's reign, the centre of rebellion and plot against her rule." (Black 1959: 71)³ and for this reason she wanted Mary to sign the Treaty of Edinburgh which Mary never ratified.

Leaving aside her life and focusing on her artistic representations, the image of Elizabeth is her most outstanding feature and it has captivated many artists, including filmmakers, because it can be instantly recognized. Nevertheless, the variations on her image shown in each novel, poem, film or series, as a woman and as a queen are huge depending on the way in which each artist decides to portray her. During her lifetime, Elizabeth protected cautiously her image and the elements associated to it. She was perhaps the first monarch to be aware of the importance of public image. Winston Churchill (1974: 81)⁴ wrote: "she had a capacity for inspiring devotion that is perhaps unparalleled among British sovereigns."

In the literary field, Elizabeth's representations are numerous but perhaps the most important one is *The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser, in which Elizabeth herself appears as a character called *Britomart*, knight of chastity, who says she is married to her people, which is a direct reference to Queen Elizabeth. It is a short epic poem divided into twelve books in imitation of the classic epic poems such as *The Aeneid*. However, Spenser died before he could finish the poem, only managing to write six of the books. Each book deals with the adventures of a knight who represents a moral virtue, because in the sixteenth century it was considered that a literary work should not just provide entertainment to the readers but also transmit a moral lesson. The poem is set in a "Faerie land" which represents England where *Gloriana* celebrates a festival lasting twelve days.

In order to understand Elizabethan poems like *The Faerie Queene*, the readers need to be aware of the political, social and religious atmosphere existing in England at the time. Regarding the characters in this poem, some of them correspond to real historical figures, such as Britomart who, as we have already pointed out, represents Queen Elizabeth, Prince Arthur, who represents Lord Leicester, Archimago who is a satiric representation of King Philip II of Spain and Duessa who is a dishonest woman who represents Mary, Queen of Scots.

In the pictorial field, there are lots of portraits of Queen Elizabeth I, mostly from the later years of her reign. These portraits have been frequently used by filmmakers to provide more credibility to their representations of the queen. One of the best examples is the BBC miniseries *Elizabeth R* (1971) which reproduced some of the costumes Queen Elizabeth wore in her portraits. It is considered by many critics the best characterization of Queen Elizabeth ever made.

However, although these portraits provide meticulous visual documentation to filmmakers, there are some of them in which Elizabeth looks ageless, such as *The Rainbow Portrait* painted in 1600 - 1602 when Elizabeth was already in her sixties. In this painting, she looks young and attractive; therefore, it is obvious that the image shown in her portraits is not trustworthy. In her diverse portraits, the image of Elizabeth changes significantly but there are some physical features which are shared in her different portraits such as her red hair inherited from her father, Henry VIII, which is her most identifiable attribute, the representation of her hands, considered by Elizabeth her best physical feature, and her identifiable way of dressing which is characterized by its ornamentation, providing costume designers with a great number of possibilities.

Nevertheless, even if there were so many relevant events during the Elizabethan period, filmmakers usually portray the same ones: the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the religious conflict and the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. Moreover, in most, if not all, cinematographic productions dealing with Elizabeth's life, her romantic relationships are portrayed: her affair with Sir Walter Raleigh, portrayed both in *The Virgin Queen* (1955) and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007), her relationship with the Earl of Leicester portrayed in the TV series *Elizabeth I* (2005) and also her relation with

Essex, portrayed for example in *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*. Filmmakers love to show the opposition between her duties as queen and her desires as a woman.

Probably due to her life experiences Elizabeth developed her diplomatic skills and her cunning. After so much time living in fear, Elizabeth's ascension to the English throne gave her an unknown freedom. The first years of her reign were tough but finally she became the glorious and celebrated good Queen Bess providing England with stability for more than forty years, a period known as The Golden Age, and it is exactly the beginning of this period in which the film we are going to be working with in class is set.

The data described here is essential to understand film directors' stance concerning particular historical and cultural data. In this case, we have selected audiovisual material related to Queen Elizabeth because the great amount of material available in this respect allows for the selection of ideal excerpt to learn and practice aspects dealing with the history, culture, language and literature in England in the sixteenth century in ESL at university level.

3. DIDACTIC SUGGESTION

Oral activities may well combine with written activities based on film and film clips. The following explains a didactic situation and the viewing of some excerpts from the film *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007) using the indications provided by Latham (2011)⁵. We describe competences, objectives by offering an activity type. After this, we propose a set of activities, which may be considered as a follow-up of this meta-activity.

Type of activity: oral comprehension activity created to develop the students' understanding of the English language oral productions, it would also be useful to transmit cultural and sociolinguistic aspects.

Competences: Communicative and linguistic competence; digital competence; cultural awareness competence.

Objectives: To develop the students' understanding of oral texts and identify general information as well as more specific information on the audio-visual productions presented. To promote language learning contextualization thanks to the use of scenes and fragments from different films selected. To promote students' awareness of the diversity of cultural expressions and of its value at different levels. To develop the students' competences, namely, the linguistic, sociolinguistic, sociocultural and discursive competences.

Level: the activities included in this proposal are prepared for level B2 of the English language. Additionally, these activities might be adjusted for students owning a C1 level.

Procedural content: identification and knowledge of the historical figure presented, Elizabeth I, and understanding of the historical context in which this monarch reigned.

Activity description: We are going to analyse some fragments of *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007) directed by Shekhar Kapur. This film is the sequel to *Elizabeth* (1998), and it is focused on Elizabeth's life as monarch of England. The film dedicates most of its screen time to Elizabeth's personal life, to the Spanish Armada matter and to the conflict between Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart.

Historical accuracy is one of the greatest weaknesses of the film and we have to highlight this so that students are conscious of this lack of accuracy. In an interview for the BBC, Blanchett claimed that it is terrifying "that we're growing up with a very illiterate bunch of children who have somehow been taught that film is fact when, in fact, it's invention. Hopefully, a historical film will inspire people to go and read about the history but in the end it is a work of fiction and selection." Two of the aspects in which there are more historical errors are time and language. During her marriage game, in 1585, Elizabeth receives the heir of the Swedish throne Erik when at the time Erik has already died. Additionally, Mary's execution, as in *Mary of Scotland*, takes place shortly after she is imprisoned when Mary is still young when in fact she spent nineteen years as an English prisoner before she was executed.

In relation with language, Raleigh speaks RP in the film when in the sixteenth century RP did not exist. While in the case of Mary Stuart, she is portrayed as having a Scottish accent while many authors claim she had a French accent and it is the most plausible version since she was raised in France. This aspect in films seems to be unimportant, but diction and accents provide more accuracy and help to shape and reinforce the context and credibility of any plot.

In *Elizabeth: the Golden Age* the opposition between Elizabeth's personal desires and her duties as Queen is presented in a similar way than in films such as *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* or *The Virgin Queen*. This is important so that students understand the monarch characterization. Additionally, at the time the relations between England and Spain were, for instance when the Dutch rebelled against Spain Elizabeth secretly supported them. Philip II instigated different Catholic conspiracies against Elizabeth. It was an undeclared war, which took place for many years, until 1585 when Elizabeth openly helped the rebels in the Netherlands, where the Spanish were promoting the Catholic faith. And finally Mary's execution in 1587 provided Philip with the excuse to invade England. It is shown as a religious crusade in which Philip attacks England with the blessing of the Pope. But the campaign was a disaster and Elizabeth was reinforced as the glorious Virgin Queen.

All these historical events presented in the film will help the students understand the historical context of the sixteenth century England. Other language, cultural and literary activities based on this film are given below:

3.1. First activity

This activity combines all five skills concerning the learning of a language. It should be of help to students of English (B2), and students of literature and cultural studies to improve their knowledge of English literature, politics, society, history and culture.

Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening and Interaction: Consider the following picture, and, before watching the film, write a paragraph with a classmate telling what sort of characterisation would Elizabeth have in the film by focusing on her look on the film poster. Then, share with the rest of your partners, and highlight similarities and differences. Finally, watch the film, and discuss whether your expectations were fulfilled, or otherwise film poster and film differ. Make a list of differences between fact and fiction. In other words, make a list of differences between the life of Elizabeth I and Elizabeth in the film.



Image 1. Film poster of the film use don this proposal, *Elizabeth: the Golden Age* (2007).

3.2. Second activity

This activity is intended as a practice of linguistic innovations brought about in the English language during the Elizabethan reign. It also contributes to practise nowadays English and drama genre conventions.

Writing and Speaking: Write a short dialogue in pairs. The dialogue goes around the arrival of Sir Walter Raleigh to England from The New World. Remember to add information showing his journey to the New World. This includes mentioning new products, such as potatoes and tobacco, for instance, and the description of new places. Remember linguistic politeness code at the time. You may find useful information in Celia Millward's *Biography of the English Language* (2012)⁶, in this respect.

3.3. Third activity

This activity seeks to practise and learn language, literature and cultural contents:

Reading, Writing, and Speaking: The following is a letter included in *The Fairie Queen. Book I*. Read it and then answer the questions that follow.

LETTER TO SIR WALTER RALEIGH

A LETTER of the Authors expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke;^[1] which, for that it giveth great light to the reader, for the better understanding is hereunto annexed.

TO THE RIGHT NOBLE AND VALOROUS
SIR WALTER RALEIGH, KNIGHT.

Lo: Wardein of the Stanneries, and her majesties lieutenaunt of the countie of Cornewayll.

SIR,

Knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be constructed, and this booke of mine, which I have entituled *The Faery Queene*, being a continued Allegorie, or darke conceit, I have thought good, as well for avoyding of jealous opinions and misconstructions, as also for your better light in reading thereof, (being so, by you commanded) to discover unto you the generall intention and meaning, which in the whole course thereof I have fashioned, without expressing of any particular purposes, or by-accidents therein occasioned. The generall end therefore of all the booke, is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline. Which for that I conceived shoulde be most plausible and pleasing, beeing coloured with an historicall fiction, the which the most part of men delight to read, rather for varietie of matter than for profit of the ensample: I chose the historie of king Arthure, as most fit for the excellencie of his person, beeing made famous by many mens former workes, and also furthest from the danger of envie, and suspicion of present time. In which I have followed all the antique poets historicall: first Homer, who in the persons of Agamemnon and Ulysses hath ensampled a good governour and a vertuous man, the one in his *Ilias*, the other in his *Odysseis*: then Virgil, whose like intention was to doe in the person of *Aeneas*: after him Ariosto comprised them both in his *Orlando*: and lately Tasso dissevered them againe, and formed both parts in two persons, namely, that part which they in philosophy call *Ethice*, or vertues of a private man, coloured in his *Rinaldo*: the other named *Politice*, in his *Godfredo*. By ensample of which excellent Poets, I laboure to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised: which if I find to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encouraged to frame the other part of polittike vertues in his person, after he came to bee king.

To some I know this Methode will seem displeasing, which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly in way of precepts, or sermoned at large, as they use, then thus clowdily enwrapped in Allegoricall devises. But such, mee seeme, should be satisfied with the use of these dayes, seeing all things accounted by their shewes, and nothing esteemed of, that is not delightfull and pleasing to common sense. For this cause is Xenophon preferred before Plato, for that the one, in the exquisite depth of his judgement, formed a Commune-wealth, such as it should be; but the other, in the person of Cyrus and the Persians, fashioned a government, such as might best be: So much more profitable and gracious is doctrine by ensample then by rule. So have I laboured to do in the person of Arthure: whom I conceive, after his long education by Timon (to whom he was by Merlin delivered to be brought up, so soone as he was borne of the Lady Igrayne) to have seen in a dreame or vision the Faerie Queene, with whose excellent beautie ravished, hee awaking, resolved to seek her out: and so, being by Merlin armed, and by Timon thoroughly instructed, he went to seeke her forth in Faery land. In that Faery Queene I mean *Glory* in my generall intention: but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our soveraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land. And yet, in some places else, I doe otherwise shadow her. For considering shee beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphebe, fashioning her name according to

your owne excellent concept of Cynthia,^[2] (Phoebe and Cynthia being both names of Diana). So in the person of Prince Arthure I sette forth magnificence in particular, which vertue, for that (according to Aristotle and the rest) it is the perfection of all the rest, and containeth in it them all, therefore in the whole course I mention the deeds of Arthure applicable to the vertue, which I write of in that booke. But of the twelve other vertues I make XII other knights the patrons, for the more varietie of the historie: Of which these three bookes containe three. The first, of the Knight of the Red crosse, in whom I expresse Holinesse: the second of Sir Guyon, in whome I set forth Temperance: the third of Britomartis, a Lady knight, in whom I picture Chastitie. But because the beginning of the whole worke seemeth abrupt and as depending upon other antecedents, it needs that yee know the occasion of these three knights severall adventures. For the Methode of a Poet historicall is not such as of an Historiographer. For an Historiographer discourseth of affaires orderly as they were done, accounting as well the times as the actions; but a Poet thrusteth into the midst, even where it most concerneth him, and there recouring to the things forepast, and divining of things to come, maketh a pleasing analysis of all. The beginning therefore of my historie, if it were to be told by an Historiographer, should be the twelfth booke, which is the last; where I devise that the Faery Queene kept her annuall feast twelve daies; uppon which twelve severall dayes, the occasions of the twelve severall adventures hapned, which being undertaken by XII severall knights, are in these twelve books

severally handled and discoursed.

The first was this. In the beginning of the feast, there presented him selfe a tall clownish younge man, who falling before the Queene of Faeries desired a boone (as the manner then was) which during that feast she might not refuse: which was that hee might have the atchievement of any adventure, which during that feast should happen; that being granted, he rested him selfe on the floore, unfit through his rusticitie for a better place. Soone after entred a faire Ladie in mourning weedes, riding on a white Asse, with a dwarfe behind her leading a warlike steed, that bore the Armes of a knight, and his speare in the dwarfes hand. She falling before the Queene of Faeries, complayned that her father and mother, an ancient King and Queene, had bene by an huge dragon many yeers shut up in a brazen Castle, who thence suffered them not to issew: and therefore besought the Faery Queene to assigne her some one of her knights to take on him that exployt. Presently that clownish person upstarting, desired that adventure; whereat the Queene much wondering, and the Lady much gaine-saying, yet he earnestly importuned his desire. In the end the Lady told him, that unlesse that armour which she brought would serve him (that is, the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul, V. Ephes.) that he could not succeed in that enterprise: which being forth with put upon him with due furnitures thereunto, he seemed the goodliest man in al that company, and was well liked of the Lady. And eftesoones taking on him knighthood, and mounting on that straunge Courser, he went forth with her on that adventure: where beginneth the first booke, viz.

A gentle knight was pricking on the playne, etc.

The second day there came in a Palmer bearing an Infant with bloody hands, whose Parents he complained to have bene slaine by an enchauntresse called Acrasia; and therefore craved of the Faery Queene, to appoint him some knight to performe that adventure, which being assigned to Sir Guyon, he presently went forth with the same Palmer: which is the beginning of the second booke and the whole subject thereof. The third day there came in a Groome, who complained before the Faery Queene, that a vile Enchaunter, called Busirane, had in hand a most faire Lady, called Amoretta, whom he kept in most greivous torment. Whereupon Sir Scudamour, the lover of that Lady, presently tooke on him that adventure. But beeing unable to performe it by reason of the hard Enchantments, after long sorrow, in the end met with Britomartis, who succoured him, and reskewed his love.

But by occasion hereof, many other adventures are intermedled; but rather as accidents then intendments. As the love of Britomart, the overthrow of Marinell, the miserie of Florimell, the vertuousness of Belpheobe; and many the like. Thus much, Sir, I have briefly-over-run to direct your understanding to the wel-head of the History, that from thence gathering the whole intention of the conceit, ye may as in a handfull gripe all the discourse, which otherwise may happely seem tedious and confused. So humbly craving the continuance of your honourable favour towards me, and th' eternall establishment of your happines, I humbly take leave.

Yours most humbly affectionate,

EDM. SPENSER.
23 Januarie, 1589.

Source: (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Faerie_Queene/Book_I/Letter_to_Sir_Walter_Raleigh)¹

¹ The letter served as an introduction to the first three books of the Faerie Queene.

² An allusion to Sir Walter Raleigh's poem Cynthia.

Questionnaire:

- [1] Who is this letter addressed to? Could you tell something about this person?
- [2] What is the relation between this person and Elizabeth?
- [3] Who sends the letter? Who is he? Why is he writing this letter?
- [4] Who is the "*The Faery Queene*"? Why is this person called so? Is there any other title given to this person in this excerpt?
- [5] What can you say about punctuation and capitalisation practices in this text?
- [6] Can you list spelling differences between Elizabethan contemporary writing as shown in this text and nowadays English?
- [7] From a literary perspective, describe the use of Classical references in this text. Is there altogether a clear authorial intention in using these references?
- [8] Explain the use of the following resource in the text, and describe what, in your opinion, the author seeks to gain by including it: "that is, the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul, V. Ephes." Find out another

instance of this sort in the text.

- [9] The author claims the following: “I chose the historie of king Arthure”. He gives a reason for this. Could you please mention here this reason, and describe it in your own words?
- [10] How would you account for the use of the word “Acrasia” in this text? Find out literary and philosophical descriptions of this word and concept.
- [11] Download any film clip creator for mobile gadgets, or otherwise for a desktop facility. Write a short version of the letter, and using pictorials, make a short clip, which includes a carousel of images related to the contents of the letter, and your reading of your version of the letter in the background.

4. CONCLUSION

Cinema is a valuable didactic resource, which has been underrated and ignored during professional practice by some lecturers at tertiary level, except for those lecturing on cultural studies. Cinema, however, can be used to create more appealing lessons and activities for our students, as shown in the present paper. As mentioned, it is suitable not just to teach cultural aspects and history but also to teach other subjects of a modern languages degree. We have shown that the use of film in tertiary linguistic and literary studies may be applied to the teaching of courses as new and complicated for students, as the *History of the English language*, for example. Film-based teaching and activities may go as far as teachers decide and want their students to get involved with. That means that students would have an active role as they do the proposed activities by watching selected films, or may create their own clips using relevant technology. This approach needs to be set out into practice in a wide scale in order to evaluate its impact on students' progress and interests in learning. For this, questionnaires have been prepared for consultation. These would be the object of future study and presentation, as constraints of space and time would go against the inclusion of this information here. In the want of the results following from the application of this proposal at a wider scale, quantified teaching and learning experiences with the suggestions for teaching presented here based on the interrogation of 54 students revealed that a total number of 93% found this new way engaging and illustrative, and a 7% preferred a more traditional, lecture-based type of contents presentation and practice. Out of 7%, a total number of 6% reacted against the use of cinema in the lecture hall, as they are not fond of cinema itself. These figures argue for the good benefits of our proposal, and we shall explain other variables in this survey in a future paper.

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