USE OF FILM SCENES AS “REAL DATA” IN AUTHENTIC PRAGMATIC ASSESSMENT

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Introduction

- Share assessment experiences with you today
- Not new method – inherited this technique from predecessor
- **Made important tweaks to enhance different aspects**
- Can lead to mutual benefit to student and teacher
- Authentic assessment is arguably achieved
  - *Involves individual problem solving*
  - *Grades are indicative of students’ ability and understanding*
  - *Some candidates need greater support (thus further experience gained)*
What is Pragmatics?

- Meaning in Interaction (Thomas, 1995) (and Situation)
- Intended meaning given factors like context, person, situation, goal, etc.
- Meaning more than what is said – they often speak indirectly
- Taking someone’s feelings into consideration when saying something
- At a picnic: “I’m tired”/”It’s cold” – could mean “Let’s go home”
- At a cafe: “Is anyone sitting here?” – normally means can I sit here
- At home: “The cookies taste interesting” – normally means they taste terrible

- In pragmatic research, the use of real data is fundamental – “constructed” examples would be invalid
Final Assignment Challenge

- Large class of around 80 students
  - More challenging to require all authentic data
  - Waiting for something interesting to happen that’s worthy of analysis
  - Could suffer from Observer’s Paradox (their recording affects the subjects’ linguistic behaviour)
  - Possible but challenging...
One Solution

- Allow students to choose freely from movie clips and treat as analyzable data
- Students need to find clip themselves – this acts as a pre-assessment
- Able to use any suitable clip that meets the basic requirements
- Films and drama are constructions of “believable worlds” and we as assessors can benefit from this:
  - We can be emotionally affected by the film – you forget its acted
  - Combination of good acting, directing, ad-libbing, script writing, etc. leads to a believable interaction
- Use of “real data” is also welcome – political speeches, unscripted TV interviews, documentaries, etc.
Pros of Using Film Scene Data

- Huge pool of data to choose from – approximately +56,000 films (English language) – multiple possible clips per film
- Vast breadth of genres, situations, dialogue types, etc.
- Students are able to choose a clip they have a personal interest in – Stanley Kubrick, vampire genre, Benedict Cumberbatch, etc.
- Instructor is able to monitor and advise – able to easily pinpoint weaker members of the class early on to give support/guidance
- Data easily accessible – YouTube, DVDs, video streaming, etc.
- Resulting analysis could be both interesting, challenging and original
Cons of Using Film Scene Data

■ It's not real data!
  - (...but it's close)

■ Some students are daunted by the huge variety of possible clips, getting lost in the selection process and the detection

■ Not all clips chosen are suitable

■ Maintenance and supervision is required

■ Not suitable for research
Basic Guidelines for Students

- Transcript should take up approximately one side of A4 (~2-4 minutes)
- Chosen scene has to be naturalistic and believable
- Chosen scene has to be complete and unedited/unbroken
- Chosen scene must be pragmatically interesting and worthy of analysis
- Application of 2-3 applicable pragmatic theories learned from the course
- Completed analysis will be around 2,000 – 2,500 words essay (5-6 sides of A4)
- Certain choices explicitly excluded – TV Sit Coms with audience laughter (Friends, Big Bang Theory, etc.); specific clips that many people previously misunderstand; languages that instructor/tutor are not native speakers of; ...
Maintenance and Advising

Several check points are necessary to ensure quality of choice:

- **Show and Tell Tutorial** – students showcase their clip to instructor and comments come from everyone – allows for cross pollination/inspiring others (but no copying)
- **Green Light for Clip** – ideally sought before plan
- **Essay Plan** (5% weighting) – to check if analysis is appropriate

If students “get lost” or “misdirected”,

- Suggest types of films, actors, directors, etc. – e.g. David Fincher, Cohen Brothers, Quentin Tarantino, etc.
- After several attempts we give an “emergency list” of films
- If still problems we have a “super emergency list” of clips
Interesting Examples

- Over the years there have been some very interesting analyses, some highly original, others very perceptive.
- Here are a few of the clips that students have chosen:
Ex. 1 – The Danish Girl

- Student identified with the main character in film
- Carried out an deictic analysis of the people talking in the scene (real and “fictitious”)
- Done with great sensitivity and (perhaps) personal experience
- Showed me a level of insight that I overlooked
Ex. 2 - Fargo

- Student was interested in the pragmatics of police interrogation/questioning
- Chose a scene from Fargo where the suspect is evading answering questions
- Had to devise a new pragmatic theory to cope with her findings and that from the literature (Potential Conversation Implicature)
Ex. 3 – Pulp Fiction

- Very interesting choice of clip with use of lethal force and how it affects conversation/negotiation
- Scene with 3-way “Mexican stand off” and associated dialogue
- Highly original choice of clip to analyze pragmatically – seems to veer towards power analysis (verbal and physical)
Ex. 4 – Toy Story 3

- Animation is also possible if the world is believable
- Scene with Lotso using verbal persuasion strategies and verbal power with Buzz Lightyear
- Not all animation can work, but there have been several good analyses from this source
Ex. 5 – My Left Foot

- In my class I had a quadriplegic student with **Spinal Muscular Atrophy** (meaning limited physical movement)
- Also allows for self expression in the choice of clip
- Chose to analyze Christy Brown who had **Cerebral Palsy**
- The scene where he becomes emotional during a dinner meeting with friends and his carer/doctor announces her engagement (to someone else)
- A good analysis of pragmatic strategies Christy uses to show his emotional state
Other Examples...

- Obligation Strategies for Entrapment in “Girl with a Dragon Tattoo”
- Possible Asperger's Syndrome Affect on Implicature Detection in “The Imitation Game”
- Power Strategies Between Director and Leading Actor in “Birdman”
- Seduction Techniques and Refusals in “The Graduate”
- Nurse Power in a Mental Institution from “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest”
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- What Makes Annoying Orange Annoying?
Use of Actual Real Data Also Encouraged

- How Barak Obama Deals with Hecklers
- Analysis of Nigel Farage's Post Brexit Election Speech
- Persuasion Techniques During Donald Trump First Press Conference
- Management of Bad News During Anthony Weiner’s Telephone Conversation
Challenges Related to Real World Assessment

- Students have to demonstrate their knowledge of the subject in first selecting the clip (we don’t give them the clip) and apply appropriate pragmatic theories from the course.

- Provides a significant assessment challenge with a high degree of latitude for:
  - expressing interest
  - original analysis
  - using naturalistic-type data

- With movie data there is a vast pool of easily-accessible situations available.

- Checkpoints allow for guidance, suggestions, inspiration and intervention (if necessary).
Additional Benefits of Method

- Wide variety of approaches and choices of clips – makes for interesting research by student and interesting reading by the instructor
- Some students are able to clearly demonstrate their strong analytic ability and originality of choice and approach
- Quite a number of students have received a ‘D’ or ‘F’ in their 5% plan and went on to do A-range analyses (appropriate intervention)
Summary

- While it may not be real data, allowing movies to be used as such brings in a rich and various source of data to allow for pragmatic analysis.
- Problem solving needed in finding a suitable clip and on how to analyze it
- Demonstration of application of pragmatic knowledge required
- Appropriate supervision given to ensure all stay on target
- Easy detection of students requiring support

Thank You for Listening! (Q&A)