

Report: Chinese Language Video Clips Project

Dr. Carl Robertson, Southwestern University,
Department of Modern Languages and Literatures

4 February 2005

Description:

The initial plan for this project was to take 5 commercially available films that each have available transcripts published, to select 5 clips each from each film and design quizzes and activities for each clip. These clips and quizzes could then be shared throughout ACS institutions for use in Chinese language programs.

Design and Implementation:

Throughout the summer of 2004 I worked with the members of Southwestern University's Language Learning Center to first digitize each film, select clips for quizzes, and then develop 3 levels of activities: pre-learning, initial exposure, and post-learning quizzes. The pre-learning questions tended to be open-ended questions about contexts or points of view relevant to the film clip. Questions in the initial exposure focused more on sounds of words and sentences, and the post-learning quiz tended to focus on usage and structure, somewhat unintentionally.

As I began choosing segments I found myself unwilling to choose only five selections for each film. With the patience of the LLC staff, I wound up selecting 10-14 clips from each of the films. The clips also became longer than originally planned, exceeding one minute in most cases. One of the films we chose turned out not to be available at all, although we do have the transcript. But we also developed a transcript for a cartoon on tadpoles searching for their mother, which was also digitized. This resulted in about 45 clips.

Classroom experience:

I used two films concurrently through the Fall Semester of 2004, "Strange Friends" for Chinese I, and "Under the Bridge" for Chinese II. Each Friday, for both classes, we viewed the segment within which the clip for that day appeared. I first explained the context, gave a few vocabulary words for grammatical items I wanted to emphasize, then played the segment, usually lasting 10 to 15 minutes. When we approached the segment corresponding to the clip I would stop the video, question the students and re-play that section over and over until I was able to elucidate every aspect of the dialogue from the students. By replaying that portion I was actually modelling how to best learn from the video clips as well as preparing them for the post-quiz.

This was a radical departure from my teaching style at Southwestern University thus far. I have been here for nearly three years and have found it difficult to fulfill both oral-aural and text-oriented aspects of language learning. The film clips have given me an opportunity to present language within culture, actual spoken discourse as opposed to textbook dialogues (usually shorter and more confined), and even offer contexts within which roleplaying activities can develop.

Results from Teaching:

The students were fairly enthusiastic about the films. They enjoyed feeling acquainted with the characters and their lives. They liked the change of pace. I personally felt more comfortable about promoting oral-aural proficiency. I have strong feelings about the way Chinese is spoken by natives in native contexts, and the films motivated me to establish some of the rhythms and cadences in the classroom.

The students were not as enthusiastic about the out-of-class activities, but they all did them, even though that portion of the grade was not very high. This in itself may be significant, as each clip should take roughly 30 minutes to complete. One reason for their lack of enthusiasm is that there were frequent errors in the clips. The wrong answer would be clued, for example, or sometimes even the wrong clip supplied for the quiz, in which case the quizzes were, of course, impossible and confusing. This only happened once, but it made a difference in the students' attitude.

As a result the LLC staff and I completely edited all of the clips and quizzes for "Strange Friends." It is the most accessible of all the films, with the clips specifically chosen for lower-level language ability.

Accessibility to ACS Institutions:

Just this past week, the first of February 2005, I delivered the address for the clips for "Strange Friends" to other Chinese language professors in ACS colleges, through Patricia Gray in ACS. The address and login name and code permit guests to view the project through SU's LLC server, as follows:

<http://lux.llc.southwestern.edu/~assign/cgi-bin/menu.cgi>

Assignment: Strange Friends
course: Junior Level - 313
Language: Chinese
Professor: Robertson
Time: 1 p.m.
User Name: guest
password: 1234

Important Note: Do not use Mozilla browser to view the video, as the video will be very small. Once the window opens (in the right browser), click on the upper right corner of the video window or it will be postage stamp size.

Eventually clips for the other films will be available: "At Middle Age," "A Great Wall," and "Under the Bridge." Videos of these films are available commercially through Cheng & Tsui. Their website is very accessible, but because of copyright problems the quality of the video is often poor (but not always!).

This project has had a very beneficial side effect that I did not anticipate. Patricia Gray has taken on the coordination of Chinese language teaching within ACS as a project.

This is something I have wanted to do ever since I learned of the considerable efforts made by Classics in the ACS organization, but it was far more than I was and am capable of coordinating on my own. Patricia facilitated posting photos and ideas on an ACS website, which has in itself solicited interest in collaboration. We are currently working on a meeting this summer for the first time to establish common ground and future goals.

Reflections:

I believe one reason that I encountered problems in this project is that I chose not to work with the ACS staff through the technology center. As this report should make clear, the LLC at Southwestern University has been incredibly helpful and supportive. The clips and quizzes became a massive project, consuming far more of their time than I imagined. But the design that worked best for us was most easily geared for on-campus use. In time we will be able to overcome these limitations. But because I used the LLC I have an ongoing relationship and a commitment to continue to develop and improve not only this project, but further projects in the future.

Assessment:

I planned assessment through comparison of semester-end results with previous semesters. I have recently implemented a new textbook, *Communicating in Chinese*, along with mandatory drill sessions outside of class, so I cannot be sure which of these three factors lead to the observations below, but I believe the film clips have had a significant impact on the Chinese program.

Observation: Students are clearly far more adaptable and individual in their spoken expression than I have ever seen in 10 years of teaching. In my regular interviews and skit assignments, 2 or 3 of each per semester, I have noticed a significant lack of imitative patterns and safe contexts. In the past I often found myself bored silly after several interviews, but have found now that each conversation is completely different than any of the others. This is not something that I expected, nor do I know of an assessment mechanism for creativity, but it is significant! Students do use a greater range of grammatical patterns and feel more comfortable using them.

I am attempting to use a nationally recognized assessment service, but after piloting one I have not yet found anything applicable to our program other than my course assessments: quizzes, performances, and exams.