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Introduction to the Special Issue

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In its 2007 Report, the MLA AdHoc Committee on Foreign Languages called for a curriculum that “systematically teaches differences in meaning, mentality, and worldview as expressed in American English and in the target language. Literature, film, and other media are used to challenge students’ imaginations and to help them consider alternative ways of seeing, feeling, and understanding things” (MLA 2007:238). While film has always been a staple resource in foreign language classrooms, it has not been used to its full potential in language study. In beginning classes, it has mostly served to provide instances of native speaker use of grammar and vocabulary or of authentic culture; in advanced classes it has served as thematic backdrop for a discussion of cultural or historical events, or as the cinematic adaptation of works of literature. Language instructors have tended to downplay the way cinematic devices contribute to the meaning of the film, while scholars in literary and film studies have tended to ignore the way grammar and vocabulary shape the very mentalities and worldviews featured in the film. Indeed, the process of developing “alternative ways of seeing, feeling, and understanding things” has to start with an awareness that seeing, feeling and understanding are always mediated through symbolic systems, be they verbal or visual. In this respect, film offers a unique opportunity to discuss the multiple ways in which meaning is mediated and constructed through various semiotic modalities: verbal and para-verbal, visual, musical, compositional, all reinforcing one another across cinematic sequences.

The interplay between a language semiosis and a cinematic one presents us with fertile ground for exploration, which is precisely the direction taken by the authors of this special issue of the *L2 Journal*. While some of the contributions in this issue bring up more traditional uses of media, e.g., as a means of teaching listening comprehension or modeling cultural practices in the target culture, the approach taken by all these papers is much broader. They reflect the belief that making students aware of the foreign culture’s value system and how it is embedded in the L2 is one of the important goals of foreign language instruction, whether their inspiration comes from the 2006 National Standards or the 2007 MLA Report. They each show in some detail how film clips (Kambara, Zhang, Kaiser), a single film (Bien), or a series of films (Dubreil) might be integrated into the foreign language curriculum; they all provide ample ideas for concrete pedagogic applications exploring language use and developing intercultural competence; and they all look at the multiple ways that meaning is constructed in a filmic text, be that at the level of the scene or the entire film.

Looking for ways to help intermediate students of Japanese correct three common pragmatic errors, Wakae Kambara (“Teaching Japanese Pragmatic Competence Using Film Clips”) describes a series of exercises based in a number of film clips that model native speaker usage, drawing student attention to the underlying significance of the language forms. She then goes on to show how the linguistic semiosis works in tandem with the

cinematic devices of framing, color palette, and scene transitions to create the scene's and film's meaning. Thus a project that started out as a purely pragmatic exercise with normative value (e.g., how to get the students to use the right particle when performing speech acts) leads to a discussion of the multimodal potential of film to make meaning and to the interpretation of subjective cultural and aesthetic values (e.g., how the use of a particular Japanese particle creates an interpersonal opening that is reinforced by the camera angle and framing of the scene).

Gloria Bien's contribution ("The Five C's: Bringing a 1980's film into the 21st Century Chinese Language Learning Context") recounts her experience of teaching a film course in third-year Chinese. It reflects on the selection of a film-based textbook, the place of the course within the curriculum, and, in contrast to several other papers in this issue, makes an argument for using entire films rather than clips. Her analysis of the pros and cons of various textbooks will be of particular interest to Chinese instructors. Bien describes the impact of the Five C's – Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities - on her teaching. She relates how her reading of the Five C's led her to redesign her course away from an orientation on vocabulary and pattern sentences to one focused on an analysis of Chinese values and cross-cultural comparisons.

Whereas the dominant thrust of Kambara's article is on training students to "function as informed and capable interlocutors with educated native speakers" (MLA 2007:238), with a short excursion into aesthetic perception, and Bien has students "reflecting on the world and themselves through the lens of another language and culture" (ibid), the emphasis of Sébastien Dubreil's monograph ("Rebels with a Cause: (Re)defining Identities and Culture in Contemporary French Cinema") is on the development of "historical and political consciousness and social sensibility" (ibid). He describes a culture/film course that explores the representation of contemporary French society in five films from the *cinéma de banlieue* with the goal of improving students' intercultural communicative competence. Dubreil centers his discussion on five cultural topics common to these films (individuals and authority, need for justice, need for equality, quest for identity, and a quest for a voice in the community), and he describes a set of pedagogical activities designed to enhance students' awareness of these issues. The role of language, music, and cinematic devices - in particular setting - in these films all play a role in his discussion.

Lihua Zhang ("Teaching Chinese Cultural Perspectives through Film") begins by critiquing the inadequate approach to culture found in Chinese textbooks, and, after establishing a theoretical framework based in critical discourse analysis, she describes her use of film clips to address what she refers to as the "current Chinese textbooks' deficiency of authenticity." She then takes one clip and in great detail presents a series of exercises demonstrating the ways that she gets students to perceive the cultural baggage in the language itself, focusing on the power relationships among the interlocutors via language, the position of actors on screen, the framing of shots, and the juxtaposition of scenes.

Finally, my own contribution ("New Approaches to Exploiting Film in the Foreign Language Classroom") examines the technological and social changes of the past several years, which, taken together, have made film, and in particular film clips, a more viable component of the foreign language curriculum. I describe the design and features of the Berkeley Language Center's Library of Foreign Language Film Clips (LFLFC), which figures prominently in Wakae Kambara's article, and, drawing on clips taken from several Japanese and Russian films, give examples of ways that the LFLFC might be used to find clips and how those clips might be employed as homework or in the classroom to develop listening

comprehension, cultural understanding, and an awareness of how meaning is created in filmic texts.

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