Shrek for Homework—On-line

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Technological advances permit the development of motivating instructional materials and activities for students. A website was constructed with background language and cultural information as well as interactive quizzes on the computed-animated film *Shrek*. A group of university English majors used these materials as part of a required listening and speaking course and then answered a questionnaire. This paper examines the feasibility of setting up and implementing such an out-of-class assignment and also evaluates it based on feedback from the students via the questionnaire.

Background

Students in Taiwan often complain of poor listening ability in English and perceive it to be the least developed of their four skills. Yet after years of study using tapes and CDs that accompany their textbooks, students need to move on to more authentic materials with all their unpredictability and varied speech styles and speeds. In the EFL context, it is also necessary to find motivating ways to give students more authentic yet guided input while also providing ways for students to check their comprehension. Moreover, students can practice and improve their listening on their own.

DVD players are popular in Taiwan and DVD films offer several advantages over videotapes. Visual and audio quality is high, and there may be extra materials (e.g., interviews with actors, games). Students like watching films and find them motivation (Lin, 2002). Even more advantageous for language learning is the possibility of varying subtitles from L1, L2, or no subtitles (Katchen, Fox, Lin, & Chun, 2001). Taiwan has the latest computer technology and many university students have their own computers or have access to one and are quite at home exploring the internet. Many computers, even notebooks, have DVD drives. Thus students have available the hardware (computers) and software (films) but need a link to show them how to use them together to improve their English listening.

Setting

A group of thirty first-year university English majors enrolled in a required English Listening and Speaking class was taught using DVD films as the course material over two semesters. There were 28 students in the first semester and 33 in the

second (these included the 28 students from the first semester, two older students who had previously failed the course, and three transfer students who were only required to make up the second semester). Their general level of English was classified as upper intermediate, with some having advanced skills. The course was team-taught by the author and her MA student, who was conducting a research study on the students and the use of DVD films (Luo, 2004).

With each DVD film (see Appendix A for syllabus, also Katchen, 2003) two weeks was spent using the film in class for both listening (e.g., comprehension questions, fill in the blank) and speaking (e.g., describe the characters, predict) skills/activities, and another two weeks was used for follow-up speaking activities (role plays, group reports). In the first semester, follow-up activities were used after each film, whereas in the second semester, follow-up was incorporated after viewing two films. Most viewing was done with English captions on; occasional listening quizzes were given with captions off. •

One copy of each DVD was available in the student self-access lab for students to view on their own time. Most of the time we did not watch a whole film in class: Sometimes the teacher skipped scenes and summarized verbally what happened, using only the scenes for which we had developed relevant activities. Other films, such as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, were too long, so we watched only the first half (also skipping some scenes); students could watch the rest on their own if they wanted. We also used supplementary material that often comes with DVDs, such as the segment in *Castaway* "About Wilson".

Work with *Shrek*

Since students would be taught using DVD films over the two semesters, it was decided in the second semester to assign a DVD film for self-access homework during the second half of the semester to gather more data. The computer-generated animated film *Shrek* was chosen not only because it was widely popular and appealing to all ages. The researcher noticed that the appeal to adults and children worked on different levels and that EFL students would most likely be unfamiliar with the various cultural and linguistic elements of these "jokes". Therefore, the researcher reasoned, it would be useful to students to have this background explained step by step, and so this became the focus of the material developed for the website. The site concentrated on vocabulary, idioms, and cultural background partly because we had done

specific listening activities in class with other films, so we felt there was no need at this time to work on specific listening skills. In addition to the *Teens* site, the material was also put on the *e-learn* site of National Tsing Hua University (http://elearn.cc.nthu.edu.tw/) because this site was used for the course being taught.

In class the teacher explained the assignment to the students, and they watched "The Making of *Shrek*" (about 22 minutes long). Students were also asked to complete three writing assignments (see Appendix B) for a maximum 5 points each and submit them using the e-learn site. The assignments were spaced at roughly one-third, two-thirds, and at the end of the film as these were times that appropriate ideas came up. By the end of the semester, almost all the students completed all three assignments. Moreover, although only one paragraph was required, many students wrote as much as a page and seemed to enjoy reflecting on the ideas about the film *Shrek*. Although these essays are not analyzed here, students showed enough positive feedback on the topics to indicate that they are stimulating and worth assigning.

To coerce students into using the *Shrek* site, they were told that at the end of the semester, they would be given an in-class quiz (see Appendix c) based on the film *Shrek* and the material on the website. Of the 20-question multiple-choice questions on the quiz, 11 could not be learned only from watching the film, although three or four of the items about language use might have been known by more advanced students (e.g., words like *stench, chatterbox, taboo word, phallic symbol*). Of the 33 students taking the quiz, six scored below the passing grade of 60%. Three had been receiving low grades in listening and other courses (one had failed the course before). Another often cut class, while still another was having family problems at the time. Analysis of their answers indicates that they had seen the film but had paid little or no attention to the website.

The *Shrek* Pages

Although students used the school's e-learn site, the web pages developed can also be viewed at http://teens.nthu.edu.tw/johanna/Shrek/shrekbranch.htm. These pages included advice on how to watch DVD films for English learning, general background knowledge and cultural background, varieties of English, and even language play. Many of the pages have also been translated into Chinese so that students at lower levels of English skills can also use the pages. Examples of the difference kinds of pages are given below.

Advice for Watching. To help you with the language, try watching the film with the English captions ON. Remember that sometimes the caption writers do not include every word, but the general meaning is preserved. Later, when you watch the film a second time, try watching at least some of it with NO CAPTIONS. You will find that you understand a lot more a second and third time and you can do it without captions.

Questions about Background Knowledge. Here (in chapter 2) we see a number of fairy tale creatures. Can you name five of the stories these creatures are from?

Cultural Background. The soldier says, "Twenty pieces of silver for the witch." Silver, of course, was used for money in various parts of the world. However, most people of European/Christian heritage known that Judas betrayed Jesus to the Romans and in return received thirty pieces of silver. Thus, receiving pieces of silver here also indicated betrayal as owners are selling their precious animal friends and Geppetto sells his creation--his wooden boy Pinocchio.

Varieties of English. Donkey uses double negatives, such as "...you ain't never seen...", typical of American Black English Vernacular. Shrek says, "That would be my home." a rather more British usage. An American would more likely say "That's my home."

Language Play. In this chapter we meet Donkey, who talks a lot. He starts off with reference to a children's game playing with words: "You might have seen a house fly, maybe even a super fly, but I bet you ain't never seen a donkey fly!" The fun of it comes from using a word as either a noun or a verb. Here's how it works. (Explanation follows)

Explanations in Chinese. 首先，用一個由修飾語(a modifier)和名詞(noun)組成的複合字(a compound noun)開始。效果最好的是用 Those that work best are those that describe different types of that noun。例如，在這裡我們用 fly。fly 有很多種。最平常的 fly 是那些偶爾會在我們煮香噴噴的飯時，進入房子裡的蒼蠅，我們通常稱牠們為 house flies。另一種大蒼蠅在動物，例如馬身旁飛來飛去的，稱之為 horse flies。

Results of the Questionnaire In addition to the in-class quiz, students were also given an anonymous questionnaire (See Appendix D). The first sets of questions on General Impressions (Appendix E, Table 3) and My Feelings (Appendix E, Table 4) were given on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (1) to Strongly Disagree (5).

Item	Average
3. The design of the web pages (colors, size of text, etc.) was good.	**1.45**
4. The web pages should be interactive.	**2.06**
7. The web pages should provide suggestions for how to listen.	**2.1**
10. It would be useful to Taiwan's students to have a website that gives background on DVD films and suggestions for how to watch them.	**1.67**
12. There was too much emphasis on vocabulary and idiomatic expressions.	**3.35**
14. There should be more explanation of cultural elements.	**1.8**

Table 1 Summary of Students' General Impressions about the Website

As can be seen from the average of the students' ratings on the items presented, students were generally satisfied with the web design (item 3), while recommending that the site be interactive and have suggestions on how to listen (items 4 and 7). They thought such a site useful (item 1) and did not think there was too much emphasis on vocabulary and idiomatic expressions (item 12). Indeed, students in Taiwan often say that these are areas in which they are deficient, that textbooks cannot teach all possible uses of all vocabulary and expressions. Item 14 "There should be more explanation of cultural elements" can be interpreted as either students liked the cultural elements presented or that there should be even more. This is also an area students generally mention when they talk about listening difficulties.

Items evaluating students' feelings about the site fell were rated by most all students as Agree or Strongly Agree. That is, students both enjoyed the site (items 2 and 5) and felt they learned something from it (items 1 and 4). Moreover, they replied that they would use such a site in future if available (item 3).

Item	Average
1. I learned a lot from the Shrek web pages.	**1.68**
2. I enjoyed using the web pages.	**1.65**
3. If such a website were available for watching other films, I would use it.	**1.71**
4. My understanding of the film increased by reading the comments on the website.	**1.35**
5. The website materials increased my motivation to watch the film.	**1.74**

Table 2 Summary of Students' Feelings about the Website

The questionnaire also included six open-ended optional questions for students to provide further suggestions or ideas. Some added comments that they'd never imagined such a site; this is very encouraging. Some wanted more links to other websites and also pictures, as well as some exercises with phrases and idioms (both good ideas). One student commented "Questions to inspire us with different ideas." This is challenging for the teacher or developer but could produce more motivation, as was evident in the writing assignments. Some other students suggested a discussion board where ideas about the film could be discussed among students.

Still another student asked for short scripts of the movie; this is an odd suggestion as the English captions come with the DVD and may indicate that that student did not use a DVD to watch the film. One student preferred in-class review and presumably felt that self-access alone was not enough for his/her learning. Some others said they would like the soundtrack or film available on the internet, but that would be impossible because of copyright.

While I used Front Page to design the site, some students suggested Macromedia Flash and elements that young people like—with movement. However, student web designers with Teens project thought my design was fine and animation was not necessary, although there is still room for improvement.

Many students expressed a desire for interactivity, such as some multiple choice quizzes with immediate feedback. I knew this was necessary and have since incorporated quizzes using Hot Potatoes©. However, there is one problem. Hot Potatoes allows students to see their scores but does not allow the teacher to collect the

scores of the users if s/he does not have access to CGI script on the server (you can pay for an account through their partner).

•One problem did appear from a background questions on the questionnaire *How did you watch Shrek?* 12 watched on DVD, 15 watched on VCD; 9 with English captions, 19 with Chinese captions. VCDs have Chinese captions but no English captions, so that those who watched on VCD limited their options and were restricted in the use they could make of English captions for their learning. Moreover, VCDs are not segmented into chapters, so this may have made it more difficult for students to follow the website suggestions, as the website is geared to the chapter separation on the DVD. VCDs are also cheaper and students can easily borrow VCDs.

In general, the replies on the questionnaire were quite positive, and the student suggestions as to website design, listening activities, interactive activities useful for further development of the site.

For Further Development

Student suggestions supported other ideas of the researcher for the further development of the website. There should be more suggestions on how to use the site and how to use DVD films to enhance listening skills, since the site is designed primarily for self-access use. These explanations in particular need also to be put in students' L1. Interactivity also has to be extended in terms of quizzes and exercises. In general, more activities have to be developed for different levels of students both for *Shrek* and also other films.

We also have to consider the situation of students using VCDs instead of the more expensive DVDs. This may mean that the English transcripts should be available on-line via links to websites which provide free screen plays (e.g., Drew's Scriptorama) in the case where students do not have access to English captions.

Additionally, we need more information on how students use the site, particularly high school students and adults who are not English majors. Therefore, we plan to pilot the *Shrek* pages with in-class support at a senior high school in Taiwan.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A, The Syllabus

Fall Semester
You've Got Mail (Katchen)
Atlantis: The Lost Empire (Luo)
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (Katchen)
Other materials (*A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving*, 6-minute clip "A Pennsylvania Christmas", "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" from *Fantasia* and Cathay Pacific TV ad based on it; pretest and post-test)

Spring Semester
The Family Man (Luo)
Girl Interrupted (Luo)
Castaway (Luo)
The Wizard of Oz (Katchen)
Lilo and Stitch (Luo)
Shrek for self-access homework during the final four weeks of the semester

Appendix B, The Writing Assignments

Writing Assignment 1 (after Chapter 7)
In Chapter 7 we met a dragon but, like the other characters in this story, it is not a typical dragon. Now comes your first writing assignment. Write a short composition on ONE of the following topics.
1. Compare the dragon in this film with a typical Chinese dragon.
2. Compare the dragon in this film with typical dragons in other (European or American-based) fairy tales and/or films.
Make it at least one paragraph, longer if you like. If you complete the assignment well, you will get a maximum of 5 points.

Writing Assignment 2 (after Chapter 12)
By now you have observed that Princess Fiona is not a typical princess. Now comes your second writing assignment. Write a short composition on the following topic.Compare Princess Fiona's behavior with that of the typical fairy tale princess.For this assignment, you will also use the structure for comparison and contrast. Make it at least one paragraph, longer if you like. If you complete the assignment well, you will get a maximum of 5 points.

Writing Assignment 3 (at the end of the film)
Write a short composition on ONE of the following topics.
1. Who is your favorite character in the film *Shrek*? Explain why you like this character.
2. The heroes of typical fairy tales are usually good-looking and virtually perfect. In *Shrek*, the characters are not at all perfect and good-looking. What do you think of this change?
Make it at least one paragraph, longer if you like. If you complete the assignment well, you will get a maximum of 5 points.

Appendix C, Quiz on *Shrek*

_____1. Who is/was Thomas Crapper?
    a.   The director of the movie Shrek.
    b.   The voice of Shrek
    c.   The writer of the story Shrek
    d.   The inventor of the flush toilet

_____2. What was the name of the boy whose nose grew long every time he told a lie?
    a.   Geppetto
    b.   Pinocchio
    c.   Peter Pan
    d.   Tom Thumb

_____3. Why does Lord Farquaad want to marry Princess Fiona?
    a.   Because he's in love with her
    b.   Because his parents want him to
    c.   Because he wants to become a king
    d.   All of the above

_____4. Who does Lord Farquaad torture by dipping him in milk?
    a.   The Gingerbread Man
    b.   The Muffin Man
    c.   Tom Thumb
    d.   Pinocchio

_____5. What's a phallic symbol?
    a.   Something that is tall
    b.   Something that resembles a sexual organ
    c.   Something old-fashioned
    d.   Something that is make-believe or unreal

_____6. What expression might you say to a child who was misbehaving as a warning to him/her?
    a.   You're going the right way for a smacked bottom
    b.   You're skating on thin ice.
    c.   I'm on the edge…
    d.   All of the above

_____7. Which of the following is a taboo word or phrase?
    a.   Take a shit
    b.   Move one's bowels
    c.   Do Number Two
    d.   All of the above

_____8. During the conversation between Donkey and Shrek on their way to rescue Princess Fiona, Shrek says ogres are like onions—they have layers. Donkey suggests two more things that have layers. What are they?
    a.   Swamps and river bottoms
    b.   Cakes and parfaits
    c.   Music and art
    d.   Books and fairy tales

_____9. Which of the following words refers to the WORST smell?
    a.   Stench
    b.   Aroma
    c.   Smell
    d.   Odor

____10. Which of the following words does NOT belong with the others?
    a.   Ass
    b.   Tush
    c.   Bush
    d.   Butt

____11. Another word for someone who likes to talk a lot is
    a.   Flatulent
    b.   Chatterbox
    c.   Pina colada
    d.   Steed

_____12. What are marriage banns?
    a.   Laws forbidding close relatives from marrying
    b.   Wedding rings
    c.   Wedding invitations
    d.   Wedding announcements

_____13. Which is the correct ending?
Mirror, Mirror on the wall…
    a.   Who will take me to the ball?
    b.   Who will love me after all?
    c.   Who's the fairest one of all?
    d.   Hear me, unto you I call.

_____14. What was the spell that a witch cast upon Princess Fiona when she was a little girl?
    a.   "By night one way, by day another."
    b.   "The night will hide your beauty."
    c.   "You will be beautiful by day, ugly by night"
    d.   "Beauty by the sun, Ugly by the moon."

_____15. What happens to Princess Fiona at the end of the movie?
    a.   She turns into an ogre
    b.   She marries Shrek
    c.   The spell is broken
    d.   All of the above.

_____16. Which of the following fairy tale creatures did you see in the film?
    a.   The Three Blind Mice
    b.   The Muffin Man
    c.   Santa Claus and his Elves
    d.   All of the above

_____17. Which of the following is a taboo word?
   a. Flatulence
   b. Pass gas
   c. Fart
   d. Break wind

_____18. Near the end of the film, when Donkey says, "I've got a dragon here and I'm not afraid to use it." What does he mean?
   a. I'm going to use the dragon as a vehicle.
   b. I'm going to use the dragon as a weapon.
   c. I'm going to use the dragon to light a fire.
   d. I'm going to use the dragon to scare everyone away.

_____19. Finish the following: "Where there's a will…
   a. There's a way.
   b. There's an inheritance.
   c. There are no ifs, ands, and buts.
   d. You can find a way.

_____20. The actor giving Donkey a voice uses a _____ accent.
   a. Black English
   b. Standard American
   c. Scottish
   d. British

Appendix D, Shrek Questionnaire 2003/6/13

Dear Students,
The current Shrek web pages are just a beginning. I would like to make such materials available to students all over Taiwan. You were the first students to use these pages and I would like to hear your opinion of them and your suggestions for how to improve them.

I. Basic Information
1._____How did you watch Shrek?
   1. on DVD 2. on VCD 3. on videotape 4. Other

2._____Where did you watch Shrek?
   1.In C513a 2. In the AV Center (near the main library) 3. In the dormitory 4. Someplace else

3._____What kinds of captions did you use most often when watching Shrek?
   1. no captions 2. English 3. Chinese 4. Other

II. General Impression
Please choose the answer which is closest to your thoughts

1._____ The Shrek web pages were fun to use.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

2._____It was easy to move around to different Shrek pages.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

3._____The design (colors, size of text, etc.) of the web pages was good.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

4._____The web pages should be interactive.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

5._____There was too much material on each web page.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

6._____The web pages should provide listening activities.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

7._____The web pages should provide suggestions for how to listen.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

8._____There were too many writing assignments.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

9._____The web pages should provide more before-watching, while-watching, and after-watching activities.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

10._____It would be useful to Taiwan's students to have a web site that gives background on DVD films and suggestions for how to watch them.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

11._____There should have been more links to other web sites.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

12._____There was too much emphasis on vocabulary and idiomatic expressions.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

13._____There should be more emphasis on grammar usage
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

14._____There should be more explanation of cultural elements.
   1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree 5. strongly disagree

III. My Feelings

1._____I learned a lot from the Shrek web pages.
　　　　1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree
　　　　5. strongly disagree

2._____I enjoyed using the web pages.
　　　　1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree
　　　　5. strongly disagree

3._____If such a web site were available for
watching other films, I would use it.
　　　　1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree
　　　　5. strongly disagree

4._____My understanding of the film increased by
reading the comments on the web site.
　　　　1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree
　　　　5. strongly disagree

5._____The web site materials increased my moti-
vation to watch the film.
　　　　1. Strongly agree 2. agree 3. neutral 4. disagree
　　　　5. strongly disagree

IV. Open-ended questions (Please write down your opinions)

1. In what ways could the design (color, text size, use of pictures, etc.) of the Shrek web pages be improved?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What else would you like to see in the content of the web pages

_____

_____

_____

3. What other kinds of activities would you like to see on this kind of web site?

_____

_____

_____

4. Should the web site provide interactive feedback? What kind?

_____

_____

_____

5. Should there be exercises or practice materials at the end of each chapter? What kinds?

_____

_____

_____

6. What other comments or suggestions do you have that were not covered in the questions above?

_____

_____

_____

Thank you very much for participating in this study and in completing this questionnaire.

Appendix E

Table 3 Students' General Impressions about the Website

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. The design of the web pages (colors, size of text, etc.) was good.	12	15	03	01	0
4. The web pages should be interactive.	07	15	09	0	0
7. The web pages should provide suggestions for how to listen.	08	11	11	0	0
10. It would be useful to Taiwan's students to have a website that gives background on DVD films and suggestions for how to watch them.	11	18	01	0	0
12. There was too much emphasis on vocabulary and idiomatic expressions.	02	02	14	09	04
14. There should be more explanation of cultural elements.	09	18	03	0	0

Table 4 Students Feelings about the Website

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I learned a lot from the Shrek web pages.	11	19	01	0	0
2. I enjoyed using the web pages.	12	15	03	01	0
3. If such a website were available for watching other films, I would use it.	12	16	03	0	0
4. My understanding of the film increased by reading the comments on the website.	21	09	01	0	0
5. The website materials increased my motivation to watch the film.	14	11	06	0	0