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## **Enhancing employability skills through the use of film in the language classroom**

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Employability is increasingly becoming a central aspect of higher education in the United Kingdom and it is becoming imperative that modern foreign languages teachers engage directly and sincerely with the employability agenda. This article proposes the use of feature films as a successful method for developing and promoting employability skills in the language classroom, an approach which has not thus far been adopted. I begin by discussing different models for the delivery of employability skills and I provide an overview of employability initiatives that have been undertaken by languages departments. The key issues of embedding versus stand-alone modules and the role of academics are addressed. While many employability initiatives focus on the development of transferable skills, I argue that the development of commercial awareness among undergraduate students has been neglected and that film is a suitable medium to rectify this. In the final section of the article, I provide some sample activities which use clips from feature films to develop employability skills at all levels of proficiency, focusing on linguistic competency and the development of commercial awareness.

### **Employability in UK higher education**

Employability has been a key element of higher education policy in the United Kingdom since the Robbins Report (1963) but has become even more so since the Dearing Report (NCIHE 1997). All of the devolved UK governments have recently underlined the importance of enhancing and developing the employability skills of undergraduates (Browne 2010 [England]; Welsh Assembly Government 2009; Scottish Government 2010; and Stuart 2011 [Northern Ireland]). From September 2012, all university courses in England have been required to publish Key Information Sets which include indicators relating to a number of aspects of the course, including graduate employment prospects, compiled from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The Browne Review (2010: 31) struck a cautionary note in this regard, warning that 'courses that deliver improved employment will prosper; those that make false promises will disappear'.

In this article, I will examine how the employability agenda can interact with language teaching in higher education. An approach that has not thus far been used in order to develop employability skills for language students is the use of feature films. After providing a brief review of selected initiatives undertaken by language departments in England regarding employability, I will argue that using film can be a successful method for the

acquisition of employability skills. I will then provide some examples of classroom activities which use clips from feature films to develop and promote employability skills.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify an exact definition of employability. Many competing definitions of employability have been developed over the years (see Clark and Zukas 2012). The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) favours an interpretation of employability as a graduate's success in securing a graduate-level job as defined by the DLHE survey (HEFCE 2012). The definition developed by the 'Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team', which was funded by the HEFCE and was active between 2002 and 2005, has been widely adopted in the area and has a markedly different focus. It states: 'employability is a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations' (Harvey and Knight 2003: 5). However, even this definition has been criticised for not taking due account of an individual's personality in the attainment and possession of certain skills and attributes (Beckett and Hager 2002: 79). Yorke (2001) also indicates that a student's character impacts on his or her success both in university and afterwards. These criticisms notwithstanding, employability in this paper is understood in line with the second definition given.

In terms of gaining employment immediately after a first degree, UK languages graduates do not perform particularly well, according to the figures from the DLHE survey 2010/11. In total, 64.7% of languages graduates are in full-time employment six months after graduation, somewhat below the UK average of 74.5% across all disciplines and 8.7% of them are unemployed, compared to a UK average of 7.6%. Although these figures are not encouraging, some of this differential may be accounted for by the fact that over a fifth (21.3%) of languages graduates engage in further study immediately after their degrees – the fifth highest percentage of the 19 subject areas covered in the survey, and well above the UK average of 14.3% (HESA 2012a, 2012b). Nonetheless, what is clear from these statistics is that there is much room for improvement in equipping languages graduates for employment after their first degree.

### **Employability and language teaching: the story so far**

The literature suggests a number of different models for the development of employability skills, namely the embedding of employability throughout the whole curriculum, the embedding of employability through only the core curriculum, work-based learning as part of the curriculum, an employability-related module in the curriculum and work-based learning parallel to the curriculum (Yorke and Knight 2006: 14). Not all of these approaches have been adopted by languages departments and additional methods to enhance employability, not indicated by Yorke and Knight, have been developed. It is important to clarify that teaching of translation and interpreting, which has clear employability and professional benefits, is not the focus of the current article.

Devising stand-alone, work-based, or employability-related modules is one method of addressing the need for employability development and has been adopted by a number of foreign languages departments. Graham Webb of Leeds Metropolitan University (in Canning 2004) devised a work-based learning module in conjunction with local businesses for which students engaged in market research for targeted industries. Laetitia Vedrenne and Sally Wagstaffe of Durham University (2009) developed a module entitled 'Marketing and the Media in France' which concentrated on the enhancement of linguistic and transferable skills, as well as providing an understanding of the marketing industry in France. Staff at the University of Central Lancashire developed an employability module which featured a

simulation of a graduate training scheme for languages undergraduates within the context of the travel and tourism industry (Pilkington 2003; Pedagogy for Employability Group 2006: 26). Julie Lawton and Catherine Franc of the University of Manchester (2009) adopted a different approach: in introducing enquiry-based learning into the French studies curriculum, they hoped to improve students' transferable skills which would help their employment prospects, namely team work, presentation, organisational and time management skills and the capacity for independent study. Another initiative was the ITALLO Project, coordinated by Ian McCall and Alessia Plutino at the University of Southampton, which developed online learning objects via a departmental virtual learning environment that ran parallel to the undergraduate Italian programme in order to 'develop skills and knowledge that would enhance students' employability' (Plutino 2012).<sup>1</sup> In conjunction with the Careers Service, the languages department of the University of Liverpool (Appleton 2009) devised a series of employer engagement and career development initiatives for their undergraduates, which benefited from corporate sponsorship. These events, such as 'Aldi does the Apprentice', presentations by employers and other competitions, were all extra-curricular, running alongside the formal course provision. Another common method of increasing language students' employability skills has been the use of e-portfolios and personal development planning to encourage students to focus on reflective practice and transferable skills (Leggott and Stapleford 2005; Orsini Jones 2004).

One of the key debates in employability circles is whether employability should be embedded into the curriculum or delivered via stand-alone or 'bolt-on' modules (Lees 2002: 6). This tension is also evident in the different initiatives outlined above. HEFCE (2011: 5) favours the embedding option, which it considers to be a 'key priority of the Government'. Others (de la Harpe, Radloff and Wyber 2000; Knight and Yorke 2001) support this view, arguing that embedding raises the status of employability in the curriculum, while Tait and Godfrey (1999) observe that stand-alone modules result in an efficient delivery of the employability skill set. Embedding employability skills into already existing modules has the advantage that 'graduate employability is not divorced from the actual subject content' (Canning 2004). As the above initiatives in language departments indicate, many have opted for the independent, employability-focused module, which ensures a high-quality input and coverage of skills for the workplace. However, many languages departments are not in a position to devote a sizeable portion of their course credits to this kind of career-focused teaching and the input required from academics to develop such a module is considerable. Thus, in line with the HEFCE guidelines, I propose the embedding of employability skills through film-based activities as part of a core language module for all year groups.

The role of academics in the development of an employability-focused curriculum is also a key issue in this debate and is acknowledged as a barrier to the successful implementation of change in this area (Pegg et al. 2012: 41; Harvey 2000a: 5). The Pedagogy for Employability Group state that one of the barriers to the effective introduction of employability into the curriculum is 'the need for stakeholders and champions with the time and energy to drive change' (2006: 7). Academics may wonder whether it is their role or that of the university's career services to provide training for future employment but, as Harvey and Knight argue, 'the direct transition into work cannot be entirely divorced from the subject area of study': they point out that developing students' employability skills, while 'not the primary role of academics, [...] is not something that can be entirely sidestepped' (2003: 9). In reference to different models for the inclusion of employability skills in curricula, Harvey and Knight have written that:

in departments with good programmes and learning and teaching arrangements, taking employability seriously doesn't mean staff having to make huge changes or completely restructure programmes. It usually involves thinking creatively within existing frameworks: making small changes to content, delivery and assessment. (2003: 10)

Film is already an established part of undergraduate language teaching and thus the question of teacher buy-in to the current initiative should not arise, as the pedagogical medium has not changed, only the focus of the activities.

Many of the initiatives described above focus on the acquisition of soft, transferable skills, such as team work, communication and presentation skills. The importance of acquiring soft skills is undeniable and is highly valued by employers (Archer and Davison 2008: 6). However, it has been argued (Cottrell 2001) that some lecturers and students resent and react negatively to the requirement to teach and learn generic transferable or key skills. There are other important aspects of the employability spectrum which have not received due attention in projects undertaken to date, namely commercial and intercultural awareness. Thus, the activities described in this paper do not focus specifically on the development of transferable skills for employability. Rather, the focus is on the development of linguistic competency in relation to the world of work, and on the development of intercultural competency related to the workplace culture and the values of the countries in which the target language is spoken. It is, of course, impossible to divorce the development of soft skills from the promotion of other competencies such as intercultural and commercial awareness. For example, in the activities described below, communication skills are highlighted in the interview task, and Activity 4 requires students to demonstrate presentation skills, independent research skills and team work. The attainment of these skills is not, however, the primary focus of the activities described. In relation to the promotion of competency in a foreign language as a skill in itself, some caution must be advised. Canning (2009: 8–9) has warned of the dangers of promoting competency in a foreign language as the only outcome of a modern languages degree, and of suggesting that the ability to communicate in another language alone equals employability. Thus, he points out that 'other skills such as intercultural competency, critical thinking and self-motivation are as equally important'.

An examination of the employability skills and qualities outlined by Yorke and Knight (2006: 8) reveals that certain key skills tend not to be addressed by foreign languages employability projects. These are: 'global awareness: in terms of both cultures and economics, [...] commercial awareness: operating with an understanding of business issues and priorities [...] and the] ability to act cross-culturally: both within and beyond the UK' (Yorke and Knight 2006: 8). Commercial awareness is an important aspect of employability (Archer and Davison 2008: 10; Canning 2007; CBI/NUS 2011) and employers state that 'language graduates would greatly benefit from a better understanding of the business world in general' (Helmerson, Lauridsen and Norlyk 2008: 15). Archer and Davison (2008: 9) have noted that the largest gap for employers between importance ranking and satisfaction ranking of skills was in the area of commercial awareness. The initiatives devised by Vedrenne and Wagstaffe, Webb and UCLAN focused on specific sectors of business (namely market research, marketing, media and tourism) and so promoted commercial awareness within these industries. However, more generic commercial awareness skills, which are not focused on a specific industry, have not yet featured prominently as part of modern foreign languages employability initiatives.

The importance of intercultural learning for students of languages is well documented (Barro 1998; Broady 2004; Byram 1997; Herron 1999; Jones 2000). Canning also points out that 'languages graduates should possess in-depth cultural insights, which will be

valued by employers, rather than being ‘only’ functionally competent in the language’ (2009: 8). In discussing intercultural communication for languages undergraduates, Mughan has observed that ‘students will benefit from a knowledge of the factors which condition attitudes towards rules, *colleagues*, *superiors*, family members, outsiders’ (1999: 63, my emphasis). Activities 1, 2 and 3 described below, aimed primarily at first- and second-year students, introduce students to communication, interaction and cultural difference in a foreign-workplace context. Many students will acquire this kind of knowledge and these cultural insights during their year abroad. Indeed, a survey of employers showed that one-third considered a graduate with any experience of studying abroad more employable (Archer and Davison 2008: 11). Students are not always able to articulate their improved intercultural competency, however. Thus, Activity 4, designed for final-year students, is intended to focus their attention on their own skills in the area of intercultural competency and to help them further develop these skills. To date, intercultural learning has not been linked specifically to commercial awareness and to doing business across cultures, in the context of language teaching. The proposed activities presented as part of this paper aim to begin to address this gap.

### **Why use film to enhance employability skills?**

There is ample evidence that students are highly motivated and engaged when presented with film material (Allan 1985; Lonergan 1984; Ryan 1998; King 2002; Sherman 2003). The use of film in the language classroom is also facilitated by most students’ high familiarity with the medium and interest in being exposed to the target-language culture. Pegum reported the results of a survey of UK undergraduates that indicated ‘a high level of enthusiasm for FL [foreign-language] cinema’ (2005: 55). In addition, the use of authentic, target-language material allows students to interact with natural language (albeit in a more polished form than spontaneous speech, without the hesitations and false starts that occur naturally), just as they would be required to do in a workplace setting. As Harvey and Knight (2003: 8) point out, employability is about ‘making students aware of the world of work’. When learning a foreign language outside of a country where it is spoken, films are one of the few ways for students to get a glimpse into working businesses, even if these have been constructed for cinematic purposes.

Teaching students how to write a formal letter and curriculum vitae, and giving students the opportunity to role-play interview scenarios, constitutes a standard part of many of the foreign-language textbooks used with adult learners. However – certainly in the case of Italian textbooks – none integrate specific films into the course. Using film to introduce employability themes and skills fulfils all three of the pedagogical arguments for using authentic materials in the classroom: culture (authentic texts represent the TL culture), currency (authentic texts reflect current issues and language) and challenge (authentic texts are challenging but can be appropriately used at all levels; Mishan 2005: 44). Film clips that focus on employability and workplaces can thus be successfully used alongside textbook material featuring more traditional work-related activities and material to produce a well-rounded provision of employability skills for the language learner.

### **Employability and film in the language classroom: sample activities**

At Manchester Metropolitan University, there is an Employability Week in each semester, during which all classes have an employability focus, complemented by sessions organised by the Careers Service. As part of a pilot programme during the academic year 2011/12, it was decided to use film clips to develop employability skills for undergraduate students of

Italian, and the sample activities were developed as part of that initiative. The majority of students are studying Italian in conjunction with another language, or TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages), although some may be studying Italian alongside another subject such as marketing or psychology. The materials have been designed to be used with students of all levels – *ab initio* students in their first year, second-year students about to go on their year abroad, and final-year students who have returned to the UK after their period of residence abroad. The emphasis in all these activities is on the development of linguistic and intercultural competencies, rather than on the acquisition of transferable, soft skills. In most cases, the activities are based around the ‘precepts of the content-based approach [...] that language learning and practice should not consist of reiterating language heard in the film but of *reacting* to it, with language use arising ‘naturally’ from the viewing of the film’ (Mishan 2005: 225). The activities described below relate to the study of Italian but could be generalised for any language, once a suitable corpus of films was compiled.

Because these activities form part of a larger language unit, the use of film clips is more suitable than asking students to watch an entire feature film in advance of the class. It is hoped that as these employability sessions are developed, the university’s Department of Languages Cinema Club (run by students) could run a series of workplace-themed films in a variety of languages, in order to generate discussion and interest in the work environments of other countries. I chose to focus on five films that were all made within the past 10 years, as they present contemporary depictions of Italian life that students may expect to encounter on their year abroad or may already have experienced in Italy. The films chosen are *Manuale d’Amore* (Giovanni Veronesi, 2005), *Tutta la vita davanti* (Paolo Virzì, 2008), *Generazione 1000 Euro* (Massimo Venier, 2009), *Mine Vaganti* (Ferzan Özpetek, 2010) and *Benvenuti al Sud* (Luca Miniero, 2010). *Manuale d’amore* is a choral film featuring separate but interwoven stories of Roman life. The protagonist of the first story, Tommaso, is a young, unemployed man looking for work (and love); the film features scenes related to his job hunt. The main character of *Tutta la vita davanti*, Marta, is also young and unemployed at the beginning of the film. A graduate of philosophy *cum laude*, she is unsuccessful in pursuing a career in publishing and ends up working as a call-centre operative. The environment in which she works is filled with motivational speeches, team-bonding exercises and weekly rankings among the workers. The film recounts the unexpected turn her life has taken and the situation for many young graduates in Italy who are employed ‘precariously’ on temporary contracts with few benefits or safeguards. *Generazione 1000 euro* explores a similar theme: Matteo has a PhD in physics but works in a marketing firm in Milan, a job he hates and from which he is sure he will soon be fired. The title refers to the €1000-a-month take-home pay that many young, highly educated Italians are forced to survive on. At the centre of the film *Mine Vaganti* is the Cantone family, from Lecce in southern Italy. The family owns a successful company which produces dried pasta. Tommaso, the younger son, lives in Rome and studies literature. He wants to be a writer but his father intends that he should take over the family business with his brother, Antonio. Neither brother wants this fate for himself. The film examines the importance of the family business in Italian society and the difficulty of managing family relationships, both personally and professionally. In *Benvenuti al Sud*, Alberto Colombo is the manager of a post office in a northern Italian town, who longs for a transfer to Milan. After a botched attempt to push himself up the transfer waiting list, he is transferred to a branch near Naples as punishment. When he arrives in the south, he is shocked at the laziness and inefficiency of the post office and its workers, although he soon forms close friendships with his new colleagues. The film highlights the differences (both real and perceived) between working practices and work ethics in northern and southern Italy.

## Sample classroom activities

### *Activity 1: Using formal and informal speech*

Depending on the level of difficulty in the chosen clip, this activity could be used with students in their first or second year. The objective of the activity is to enable students to recognise the characteristics of formal language, in terms of both grammatical structure and vocabulary, and to aid students in moving between different linguistic registers. For this activity, clips are required that feature colleagues and/or superiors discussing a workplace-related issue using a formal register. I have chosen to focus on *Benvenuti al Sud* – specifically, on a scene in which Alberto, the post-office manager, is castigating his staff for their weak work ethic and explaining changes that will be introduced into the workplace.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Sequence of tasks*

- 1) Students are given a brief overview of the characters and plot of the film. They then watch the scene in question, with the volume turned off. They are asked to guess what is happening in the scene by relying on facial expressions and body language. Once they have understood the context of the scene, they are asked to anticipate useful vocabulary related to a formal staff interaction of this type (some prompts can be provided by the tutor if necessary).
- 2) The students now watch the scene with sound and must identify the elements of speech that indicate formality.
- 3) The third phase of the task asks students to adopt the perspective of one of the staff members seen in the clip. They must then act out a role play in which they recount, from their chosen character's point of view, the key aspects of Alberto's speech either to an absent colleague (using the formal register) or to a friend (using the informal register).

### *Activity 2: Preparing for job interviews*

This task focuses on the linguistic and communication skills required to succeed in a job interview situation. It can be used with second-year students, who may look for a part-time job in Italy during their year abroad, or with final-year students, who may be considering employment in Italy after graduation. This activity can be focused on just one example of a job interview or on several scenarios, so that students can compare and contrast the candidates' performances. In this instance, I have focused on *Manuale d'amore*, in which Tommaso lies about his experience and qualifications during a number of different interviews. When selecting suitable scenes, it is preferable for the candidate not to be particularly successful, as this provides more scope for comment.

#### *Sequence of tasks*

- 1) In small groups, students brainstorm to compile a list of generic interview questions in Italian (e.g. describe an experience in which you have shown initiative; what are your strengths and weaknesses). Students feed back to the whole group and discuss whether there is anything missing.
- 2) Then students watch the short interview scene.

- 3) Following the clip, students are asked to comment on the candidate's performance. Then, using the questions prepared in step 1 and the questions observed in the clip in step 2, the students are asked to role-play the interview situation again, without making the same mistakes as Tommaso. The role-plays are then performed for other class members, after which students provide comments and advice.

### ***Activity 3: Images of Italian workplaces***

This activity is aimed at giving first-year students a taste of workplace culture in the target country. First-year *ab initio* students of Italian often have very little knowledge of the target culture; thus, highlighting this aspect of daily life is useful in raising both their commercial and their cultural awareness. The aims of the activity are thus to introduce students to key vocabulary and expressions related to the workplace and the world of work, to introduce students to images of different workplaces in Italy and to raise awareness about cultural similarities and differences in relation to the workplace. The work-focused chapters of textbooks often feature printed job advertisements, but they do not offer students a glimpse into a workplace environment. For this task, the tutor must select a number of film clips featuring different workplaces and job situations in the target country (each of three to four minutes' duration). For this activity the jobs chosen were a postman (*Benvenuti al Sud*), a marketing executive (*Generazione 1000 Euro*), a call-centre worker (*Tutta la vita davanti*) and a company manager (*Mine Vaganti*). In addition, the tutor must provide job advertisements in Italian which correspond to each of the jobs shown in the clips. These can be invented or a corresponding job may easily be found on an employment website. The use of film clips to bring the job adverts to life injects an air of authenticity into proceedings and students enjoy getting a chance to see for themselves what certain jobs might be like (although clearly some aspects may be exaggerated, depending on the genre of film).

#### *Sequence of tasks:*

- 1) Students read the job advertisements and complete an accompanying worksheet which involves an exercise on synonyms and comprehension questions.
- 2) Next, students are asked to identify their preferred job from the options given and are asked to explain their choice in Italian, first working in pairs and then feeding back to the whole group.
- 3) Students watch the clips, which correspond to the job adverts. As they watch, they must make a note of any useful phrases or expressions they hear which relate to the workplace.
- 4) The whole class discusses what useful vocabulary they learned from the clips. They are then asked a number of questions in Italian: did the representation of the jobs correspond to what they had expected? Have they changed their minds about their preferred job? Why/why not? Did they notice any differences from a similar work environment in the UK? If so, what were they?
- 5) An extension of this activity, in order to make it suitable for more advanced-level students, would be to ask students to write, as a homework exercise, a letter of application for one of the four jobs that they had encountered during the task. Preparation related to the structure and language of a formal letter of this type would have to be provided in advance.

#### ***Activity 4: Italian workplace culture***

Unlike the other three tasks described above, this activity should be extended over a number of different classes. This activity is most suitable for final-year undergraduate students with an advanced knowledge of Italian. The aims of this sequence of activities are to address the issue of commercial awareness and to encourage reflection on workplace culture in Italy, to encourage reflection on the importance of intercultural competence and to improve oral skills through presentation and discussion.

For this activity, the tutor must decide on specific aspects of the target country's workplace culture to be targeted and locate film clips which highlight these issues. This activity is the most language-specific as each country will have different pertinent issues related to the work environment. When asked about the importance of understanding culture for the workplace, students often make reference to quite basic elements, such as different eating times and etiquette when meeting new people. Focusing on specific issues which are relevant to the economy of the target country encourages students to reflect more deeply on what is meant by culture in the context of the workplace and how this may be valuable to them as they graduate and enter the labour market, either in the UK or abroad. The aim of this task is not for students to integrate specific language used in the clips into their active repertoire; rather, it is to use the clips as a starting-point for discussion and research into the highlighted aspect of the target country's workplace culture. In this case, I focused on the differences between workplace culture in the north and south of Italy using clips from *Benvenuti al Sud*, and the role of the family business in the Italian economy using clips from *Mine Vaganti*.

#### *Sequence of tasks:*

- 1) The session begins with a whole-class discussion in Italian about the students' current knowledge of and familiarity with Italian work environments: what experience do they have of working in Italy? Are there any differences between England and Italy? How important is it to understand Italian culture and habits in order to work successfully in a cross-cultural environment?
- 2) Students watch some short clips featuring workplaces in Italy.
- 3) After each clip, in small groups, students are asked to discuss in Italian what they have seen and to make comments. Questions could include: what do these scenes tell us about the Italian workplace? What similarities or differences are there to UK workplaces? Do any aspects surprise you? How realistic do you think these representations are, based on your experiences of Italy?
- 4) The intention is that in step 3 the students will identify the salient issues featured in the clips – in this case, the north–south divide and the role of the family business. Students are then divided into small groups (of three to four people) and are assigned to one of the chosen films. Their task is to research the workplace issue over a two-week period and then to deliver an oral presentation on it and its relevance to the society and economy of Italy. Students are expected to engage with newspaper articles, government reports and relevant statistics. In the case of *Benvenuti al Sud*, students would be expected to address differences in productivity between northern and southern Italy and the relative importance of the state sector to southern Italy, while for *Mine Vaganti*, they would be expected to consider the high percentage of family-run businesses in Italy and their impact on the Italian economy.

## Conclusions

Film can be used to enhance employability skills at all language levels, and their use does not necessarily rely on a high degree of familiarity with the target language and culture. As long as activities are suitably graded to the abilities of the group, employability can be an element of the curriculum from the first year of study. I have argued that language teaching and the employability agenda can successfully co-exist in the classroom, with film used as a tool to enhance the development of these skills. As film is already a widely utilised resource in language teaching, the potential issue surrounding tutor 'buy-in' can be mitigated. Film-based activities related to employability can also be used in conjunction with more traditional work-related content, as featured in textbooks. Films have not yet been systematically harnessed to highlight work situations and workplace culture in the target country (for an exception see Etienne and Sax 2006). Sherman (2003: 151–2, 172, 204–5) also includes some suggestions for video-based activities that focus on the workplace. Using film engages students and offers a semi-authentic look into the work life of the target country, which is useful for students at all stages of the course. The intention is to further develop these sessions, extending the content over a number of weeks to include a more diverse range of activities and exercises.

There are, of course, some limitations to this proposal as it currently stands, which will be addressed in the next phases of development. This study has highlighted classroom activities but has not empirically examined the acquisition of employability skills through the use of film as part of language teaching. This is an area for future work. However, it must be noted that it is inherently difficult to assess the success of employability initiatives. As Gibbs points out, 'relying on HESA's very short-term employment data [can be] a risky thing to do' (2010: 42). There are also problems with students' self-assessment of acquired skills, as such feedback can be 'either trivial or fail to demonstrate whether or not students have actually become more employable' (Pegg et al. 2012: 43). On this point, Yorke (2010: 10) has highlighted the fact that an interest in enhancing the employability of students requires institutions to consider the issue of assessment. There was formative assessment of the activities presented here during class time but the topics were not integrated into the module's summative assessment. This aspect will be addressed in future variations of the activities presented.

Although these activities have focused on Italian, they could easily be adapted for use with different languages. The most onerous part of such a process is compiling a corpus of suitable films. In order to facilitate this compilation of a multilingual corpus of films, I have begun a blog entitled *Workplaces on Film: Developing Employability Skills for Language Learners*. The blog can be accessed at <http://workplacesonfilm.blogspot.ie/>. The blog invites academics and tutors working in any language to suggest films that feature workplace scenarios for inclusion.

Graduates of a modern languages degree have a greater opportunity than graduates of other disciplines to develop skills that are highly valued by employers, namely global commercial awareness and the ability to do business across cultural divides. However, students are not always successful in highlighting their acquisition of these skills to potential employers. Thus, it is hoped that the inclusion of film in employability-focused teaching, with specific attention placed on intercultural and commercial awareness, will go some way towards improving MFL graduates' prospects in an increasingly competitive employment market.

## Notes

1. These resources are available now online and include topics focusing on doing a job interview and compiling a video CV. See <http://languagebox.ac.uk/2533/>
2. The first part of this activity draws on an activity described in Etienne and Sax (2006).

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