



## Classroom Ideas

### Introducing Study Abroad On Screen: *English Vinglish*

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この実践講座では、留学の出発前あるいは、後の授業に、『マダム・イン・ニューヨーク』(2012年)の映画を日本語字幕なしで使用する方法について解説します。この映画は、アイデンティティや印象、ステレオタイプに関する問題が強調して描かれているため、議論に最適です。この実践講座では、海外留学中に起こりやすい5つのケースの紛争解決について言及します。

キーワード：外国人のための英語教授法、授業でのビデオの使用法、留学中に起こりやすい問題とその解決法、偏見

As the number of people studying abroad across the globe increases, it is not surprising that the number of study abroad themed films has also increased. One of the earliest film from Japan with a study abroad theme is Tsuchimoto's *Ryūgakusei Chua Sui-Rin* (1965): a documentary about a Chiba University student from Malaysia during the early 1950s who experienced visa problems due to his pro-communist sympathies. This film underscores how vulnerable foreigners can be in some countries if their political views run counter to the status quo. Another study abroad themed cinema is Kumazawa's *Jinkusu!!!* (2013), a drama about a Korean college student spending a semester at a Japanese university. This bildungsroman offers glimpses of how Japanese and Korean cultural norms differ.

On the other side of the globe, Girault's *Les Grandes Vacances* (1967) is a pioneering study abroad film. In this Franco-Italian comedy, a straight-laced French headmaster sends one son off to England to study as punishment for failing an important exam. The headmaster's other son then falls in love with a British exchange student. Girault's work frames study abroad as a light-hearted vacation and illustrates what can happen if students reluctantly study overseas.

At least twenty study-abroad themed films have come out since the 1980s, discounting an entire adult entertainment genre that portrays foreign exchange students as exotic objects with twisted psychological needs. An analysis of such films is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the ways overseas students are depicted as cunning and unscrupulous as in Milton's *The Foreign Exchange Student* (2015) or as withdrawn and abnormal as in Paradis-Barrère's *Kana, Ici Ou Là* (2014) exemplifies how often they are peripheralized.

This article describes one possible way of highlighting a few of the dilemmas that can happen during study abroad by critically examining one film. Although Shinde's *English Vinglish* (2012) is mainly about an Indian housewife in New York, it depicts more than a few of the culture shocks that Asians in Europe or North America are likely to face. It also skillfully exposes students to varieties of English that are seldom heard in Japanese university classrooms.

### Target Audience and Time Frame

This film was originally produced in Hindi, Tamil, and English and it has since been dubbed into over a dozen languages. Although the Japanese version of this movie could be adapted for Japanese EFL classroom use, this activity describes one way of using its English video clips without any Japanese sub-titles. Hence, it is best suited for university students with CEFR B1 levels of English proficiency or higher. Since that is above the level of most undergraduates in Japan, this would probably be apt for students who have spent a semester or more abroad. This activity could be

incorporated as part of a study abroad post-return course. It might also be used in a pre-departure context for students with CEFR A2 proficiency, if ample linguistic accommodations are provided.

This activity could be implemented in various time frames. Personally, I recommend five thirty-minute class sessions. However, it might also be done in one or two extended sessions.

### Materials Needed

I recommend critically examining six YouTube video clips of *English Vinglish* to stimulate discussions. Some teachers might prefer to skip Video Clips #4 and #5 since they are about cross-cultural taboos that might be difficult to broach.

In addition to the six video clips outlined in the References, these two handouts are recommended:

- **Handout 1** outlines six specific ways of dealing with linguacultural misunderstandings. Each participant should receive a copy of this handout, which is in *Appendix A*, on the first session.
- **Handout 2** provides five cross-cultural vignettes about conflicts that sometimes happen during study abroad. This handout, which is in *Appendix B*, can be distributed either together with Handout 1, or at some latter point during this activity.

Finally, you may want to print out posters from this film to make the narrative more vivid. Many students will want to watch the entire video, so inform them of legal viewing options.

### Procedure

One way of doing this activity is through the following nine steps:

#### (1) Introduce the film

This film could be introduced in many ways. I prefer to introduce it through a short mini-listening task, as in this introduction:

People study abroad for various reasons. Today we're going to examine a film about an Indian housewife who went to New York to help with a niece's wedding. The English title of this film is *English Vinglish* and it came out in 2012. The word "Vinglish" usually means "Vietnamese style English" just as "Japlish" sometimes refers to "Japanese style English." Both of these expressions are derogatory - that means impolite or insulting. In the context of this film, the word "Vinglish" means "non-standard English." People who speak non-standard English, or those who do not speak English well are sometimes looked down upon. This film is the story of one such person, and what she does to change that.

First of all, the main character in this film is named Shashi, and she is portrayed by a famous Indian actress. Her husband is fluent in English and her daughter also speaks English well. In fact, apart from her grandmother and young son, Shashi is the only person in her family who isn't fluent in English. In India, English is often considered a social status marker - a sign of being well educated or upper class. So Shashi has an inferiority complex about her English. In other words, she feels that she is stupid because she cannot speak much English. People often disparage Shashi for her poor English. That is to say, they speak badly about her, laugh at her, or imply she is not smart.

Shashi's sister is in New York, and Shashi decides to go there to help out with a family wedding. Indian weddings are often huge and Shashi has a special talent for making sweets, which will be useful for the wedding. Shortly we will see the first video clip about her experience at a deli in New York - a place where people buy food and beverages.

It may be good to pre-teach some vocabulary items that are likely unfamiliar to some. Here are some core vocabulary items that might facilitate the understanding of this clip:

\* Vinglish, Japlish \* derogatory \* status marker \* inferiority complex \* disparage \* deli \* imply

If you are working in a multilingual setting, pointing out how this film's titles in various languages differ could be interesting:

\* English Title: English Vinglish  
\* German Title: Englisch für Anfänger (lit. "English for Beginners")  
\* Japanese Title: マダム・イン・ニューヨーク (lit. "Madam in New York")

- |                                    |                                 |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| * Korean Title: 굿모닝 맨하탄            | (lit. "Good Morning Manhattan") |
| * Simplified Chinese Title: 印式英语   | (lit. "Indian-Style English")   |
| * Traditional Chinese Title: 救救菜英文 | (lit. "Saving Food in English") |

## (2) Warm Up

Confirm that students understood the introduction and core vocabulary. Also, before viewing the first video clip, I recommend that participants discuss these warm up questions in pairs or small groups:

1. How are people who don't speak much Japanese often treated inside Japan?
2. How are Japanese who cannot speak English well sometimes treated in English-speaking countries?
3. Have you ever had an inferiority complex about your English? (If so, how did you overcome it?)
4. Have you ever disparaged (spoken ill of) anyone because of the way they spoke?
5. What is the best way to deal with someone if they disparage you because of your accent, grammar, or vocabulary?

Now we are going to see the main character of this movie, Shashi, enter a deli (a shop that is somewhat similar to a cafeteria) in New York City.

## (3) First Video Clip

Have students view the clip entitled *Sridevi places her million dollar order*. This clip is 4 minutes and 32 seconds long and takes place near the beginning of this 113-minute film. After viewing the clip, I recommend discussing these questions:

1. What were the various customers inside this shop doing?  
And does that differ from what customers inside Japanese shops generally do?
2. How did Shashi respond to the deli clerk's first question?
3. How do you think that Shashi should have responded to that inquiry?
4. What was the attitude of the deli clerk behind the counter toward Shashi?
5. Why did Shashi rush out of this deli?
6. After Shashi left the deli, she began to cry. Why?
7. At the end of this clip, a French man helped Shashi. What did he do - and why?

At this point, it might be good to talk about cultural shock and linguistic breakdowns. Depending on student responses and the time available, this could also be a good chance to mention ways of dealing with linguistic misunderstandings, as outlined in Appendix A.

If you plan to do this activity in several short 30-minute increments, an apt way to conclude today's session would be to ask participants to write a letter of advice for Shashi in a "Dear Abby" format. You could encourage them to specify two or three things that Shashi could do to make her overseas experiences overseas more productive. If, however, you prefer doing this activity in one extended session, proceed directly to the next step.

## (4) Second Video Clip

I recommend starting off by providing a synopsis of what has happened so far in this movie. Here is a short summary in sheltered English:

So we are learning about the experiences of an Indian woman in New York. Some of those experiences might be similar to what some of you have had - or will have - when traveling overseas. The main character of this film, Shashi, is in New York to help with a family wedding. She had a humiliating experience at a deli there because she could not communicate clearly in English. In other words, she felt embarrassed because her English was not understood. The clerk at that deli was impatient with her, and Shashi became very upset. She spilt her coffee, then ran out of the shop. Shashi started crying soon after that, but a kind man from France cheered her up and gave her some coffee. Let's see what Shashi decides to do now to overcome her linguistic handicap and make better use of her time in New York. Will she withdraw into a shell by only speaking with others who speak Hindi, her mother tongue? Or will she confront her linguistic handicap and try to improve her English? Let's see!

Depending on the audience, you might want to pre-teach these core vocabulary terms:

\* humiliating \* cheer up \* linguistic handicap \* respond \* enroll \* prompt (somebody) to + [verb]

The second video clip, *Shashi Enquires About English Tutions* [sic], is under two minutes in length. After playing the entire clip, have students explore these questions:

1. Why did Shashi telephone the New York Language Center?
2. How did the woman answering the phone at that language school respond?
3. In what ways was this phone call a success?
4. How do you think Shashi's phone call could have been smoother?
5. What prompted Shashi to enroll in the New York Language Center?
6. What prompted you to enroll in this class?

Depending on the class context and time available, you could have students role model the process of making telephone appointments in pairs. Many Japanese students need more pragmatic practice politely asking others to adjust their speed and content. Also, some Japanese need to hone their telephone skills. In this video clip, Shashi ended her phone call rather abruptly without any pragmatic close. If many students seem to need help in this area, this video clip offers a teachable moment.

### (5) Third Video Clip

In the third video clip, *Sridevi attends* [sic] *her english* [sic] *speaking classes*, four students at the New York Language Center introduce themselves. Play this clip once and have those in class fill in the information gap below:

Name	Nationality	Occupation	Why Learning English?
Eva			
Salman Khan			
Laurent			
Shashi			

Before playing this 4-minute and 36-second video clip a second time, it might be good to confirm the understanding of these core vocabulary terms:

\* innuendo(s) \* queen [slang] \* idiom: out of the closet \* LGBT \* reframe \* suspect

At this point, play the video clip in segments, pausing the clip at each bracketed time frame following the discussion questions below.

1. [0:46] Do you feel Eva's self-introduction was successful? Why or Why not?
2. [1:00] Why did people laugh when Salman Khan, the man from Lahore, implied he was a "queen"?
3. [1:46] What sort of innuendos about gender stereotypes did you notice in this film clip?
4. [1:46] In your view, did David (the teacher) and Salman Khan (the man from Pakistan) differ in their attitudes towards LGBT folks?
5. [2:21] How does Laurent describe his English? How would you describe your English?
6. [3:48] How did the teacher help Shashi reframe her identity (see herself in another way)?
7. [3:59] Why do you suspect (think) Laurent was waiting for Shashi after class?
8. [4:18] How did Shashi feel after her class just finished?

Depending on the classroom goals and time available, this video clip can serve as a springboard for a discussion of sexual identities, homophobia, and notions of normalcy. If you are using this clip as part of a post-return study abroad session, it might be interesting to ask participants how taboo topics varied in their host countries and in Japan. However, not all Japanese will feel comfortable

discussing such topics. That in itself can be a good chance to consider which topics should remain private ('in the closet') and which should become public ('out of the closet'). Point out that the answers to such issues are not constant across cultures: what is considered a valid conversation topic in one culture might be regarded as taboo or offensive in another.

If you plan to do this activity in several short increments, a good way to conclude today's session would be to ask participants to contrast some taboo topics in Japanese society with any culture of their choice. This might be a culture that they have recently visited while studying abroad - or perhaps a place they are planning to visit. If you have decided to do this activity in a single extended session, however, proceed directly to the next step.

#### (6) Fourth Video Clip

Start off with a brief synopsis of what has happened in the film so far. Here is one possible summary:

We are roughly halfway through the film *English Vinglish*. Shashi has been attending a four-week English language course at a school in New York City for two weeks. Her husband and children are still in India, but they will be coming to New York to attend a huge family wedding in about ten days. By this time, the students in David's English class have come to know that their teacher is gay. Some of his students accept that, but others struggle and believe it is somehow scandalous (shocking). Because of cultural conditioning – the ways they were taught to think while growing up – not all of them they can accept LGBT persons. Today we are going to see a short video clip that highlights some cross-cultural taboos. We will reflect on what is proscribed (not permitted) in Japanese society, and how this sometimes differs from what is considered taboo (forbidden) in other societies.

Before playing the video clip, it might be good to confirm these core vocabulary items:

\* gossip \* taboo \* scandalous \* ridicule \* have an affair \* confession \* be outcast \* sexual orientation

Play the clip *Shashi finishes the task* in segments, pausing at each bracketed time frame to discuss each of these questions:

1. [0:56] At the start of this video clip, students were gossiping about their teacher's sexual orientation. How did various students respond when learning David was openly gay?
2. [2:08] The Indian software engineer Ramamurthy is often ridiculed by his colleagues. He mentioned that his coworkers considered him "an idiot." Why?
3. [2:58] How does Salman Khan, the taxi driver, describe his English class? How would you describe most of your English classes? Are English classes in Japan and overseas very different? (If so, why?)
4. [4:04] Udumbke is a quiet student from Africa. What confession does he make to his classmates?
5. [5:05] The French cook Laurent said something that shocked most students in this class. Why?
6. [5:35] Shashi is reluctant to accept Laurent's feelings and several students felt Laurent's behavior was immoral and inexcusable (unacceptable). Although Shashi's marriage is not happy, she does love her children and wants to avoid becoming a social outcast – rejected by her community. What would you do if you were in Shashi's situation?

This video clip can set the stage for a discussion of ethno-relativism and ways that we often stigmatize or peripheralize others we disagree with. Since many students will be unfamiliar with those concepts, introduce them briefly to the class, contrasting ethno-relativism with ethno-centrism. Chances are, students will have varied views on this topic. Quite likely, this classroom activity should be framed as an *introductory* discussion. Encourage people to share their views, but also alert to the possibility some students might try to dogmatically co-opt others. Although classroom discussion of this issue is unlikely to dramatically change anyone's opinion at first, perhaps it can facilitate the exploration of issues that are often glossed over in classes in Japan.

If time allows, discuss the process of *stigmatization* – socially outcasting others because they possess characteristics that are considered undesirable. This can occur as a result of language, race, nationality, religion, or sexual orientation. Mention concrete examples of stigmatization in Japanese history and some current groups that are being stigmatized by various factions in Japan. Stigmatization and peripheralization involve complex questions and overseas sojourners sometimes

confront them in messy ways. Appendix B provides a five sample vignettes and possible ways for dealing with such problems.

If you are doing this activity in short 30-minute increments, one way to conclude today's session would be to ask participants to write about any moral quandary: any situation in which their values differed from others around them, then how they deal with that. Chances are, those who have studied abroad over a month have experienced such dilemmas. However, even those who haven't probably have experienced a values clash at some point in their lives.

### (7) Video Clip #5

Before showing the next video clip, it might be good to summarize the film so far. Here is a brief synopsis:

Now Shashi is in the third week of her four-week English class at the New York Language Center. She is gaining confidence in her English and becoming friends with the students in her class. One student, a man from France named Laurent, has been coming on to her. In other words, he is infatuated with her. More casually, we can say he is "crazy about" her. However, in Shashi's culture it is taboo for married people to have close relations with persons of the opposite sex outside of their families. If Shashi spends too much time with Laurent, she will be stigmatized and outcast. In other words, it would amount to a major scandal and her reputation would be ruined (damaged). Laurent seems unaware of this: in his culture, many people believe that marriage is old-fashioned, and emotional candor (frank expression) is valued. In today's video clip, please notice how Shashi and Laurent interact (behave with each other). To what extent are their feelings mutual (two-way)? To what extent is Laurent likely deluded (fantasizing)? How does our own cultural conditioning (programming) likely influence the ways that we perceive things?

These core vocabulary items should probably be reviewed before watching the video clip:

\* come on to    \* be infatuated with    \* stigmatize(d)    \* outcast    \* convention(s)    \* be deluded  
\* be nostalgic    \* sexual harassment    \* sensitive    \* confession    \* liberated    \* immoral

Next, play the video clip *Laurent & Shashi get too close*, pausing at each bracketed time frame to discuss the questions below.

1. [0:17] Why did the software engineer Ramamurthy get so emotional about the food that Shashi made for him? Have you ever felt very emotional about the food from your hometown?
2. [1:08] How did the students respond when the teacher announced a class examination?  
How do you usually respond when your teachers tell you about an upcoming exam?
3. [1:18] Shashi was upset when hearing about the exam because she has promised to attend a wedding on the exam date. What do you think Shashi should do?
4. [3:39] Laurent does something that makes Shashi feel uncomfortable in this clip. What was it?  
In your view, is Laurent a playboy or a fool?
5. [3:39] In some societies, Laurent's behavior would be described as "sexual harassment" and immoral. What is your view?
6. [3:39] What are some appropriate ways of avoiding sexual harassment when traveling overseas?  
What should you say to someone if someone was infatuated with you, but you felt no interest in them?

If you wish to add a reading/writing component to this lesson, have students read and discuss the comments on this video clip's YouTube website. Ask students which comments they agree with and which they disagree with. Since many Japanese are reticent to express personal feelings about sensitive topics, this might be a good exercise to have them comment on complex issues that involve strong emotions and societal norms.

Another option would be to ask students to provide advice for Laurent and Shashi: two people who have been culturally conditioned in vastly different ways. Many overseas travelers are likely to confront perplexing questions about human relationships, and often their values will contrast with the norms of their target location. This video clip can offer a good chance to reflect on how to deal with cultural clashes that can arise in such scenarios.

### (8) Video Clip #6

An interactive way of doing this lesson would be to have students summarize what has happened in the film so far. If students have already watched this video outside of class and are fairly proficient at English, this can be done through a round robin technique in which each student makes one sentence about the film in a chronological fashion. An opening sentence might go like this: *This is a story about an Indian woman named Shashi who travels to New York to help out with a family wedding.* A next sentence that could naturally follow might be something like this: *At first she felt lost and she was not even able to successfully order a cup of coffee at a deli.* Encourage students to continue the narrative in a round robin fashion, adding corrections and/or hints as necessary.

If students have not watched this video outside of class, then perhaps a review of the movie in sentence completion format would be more appropriate. In this approach, the instructor begins a sentence about the film and then invites participants to complete it as they deem appropriate. In most cases, each sentence-head can have many possible endings. Here is one possible sentence-completion review of this movie, with possible endings in italics:

1. We have been watching some video clips about *one Indian woman's experience in New York.*
2. The main character of this movie is *a housewife named Shashi who is not proficient at English.*
3. Many people look down on Shashi because *her English is not so good.*
4. When first arriving in New York, Shashi feels *out-of-place and bewildered in many ways.*
5. One of the biggest challenges about living in New York for Shashi is *understanding the language.*
6. Shashi decides to enroll in an English *language school in New York to improve her English skills.*
7. The students in that class come from *diverse parts of the world and have differing occupations.*
8. The class teacher, David, is openly *gay* and this is hard for some students to *accept.*
9. Shashi encourages other students to be *tolerant* and to *avoid becoming too judgmental.*
10. One student in the class, Laurent, feels *very attracted to* Shashi and this makes her *uncomfortable.*
11. To graduate from the class, each student has to *deliver a five-minute speech in English.*
12. Shashi will give her final speech at a wedding and she invites *all of her classmates to attend.*

In many Asian EFL classes, spontaneous extemporization is atypical: most students are told to rely on their books or a series of printed exercises (Furuyama, 2008). However, in real-time pragmatic interactions extemporizing is often called for, so this type of activity might have value.

If a less linguistically demanding review activity is called for, one option would be to give each student just one sentence about the film in scrambled order, then invite the entire class to figure the overall sequence. The scrambled sentences should contain enough explicit discourse markers to provide hints about how to sequence the narrative. If you wish, this activity can also help students understand discourse markers better – a topic which is seldom covered in Japanese EFL classes since the focus is generally on sentence-level grammar (Hirose, 1998, p. 51). Here is one possible summary of the film. (The sentences are scrambled, but correct sequence is in Devangari numerals. After students have had some time to work on the sentences, you can mention how the numbers 0 – 9 are represented in Devangari to help them unravel this.)

- १७ And now we shall hear Shashi's final wedding speech!
- ८ Following this, Shashi decided to enroll in an English school to become more adept at English.
- ६ For example, she tried to order some food at a deli, but the clerk became irate (impatient) with her.
- १० One student in the class named Laurant fell in love with Shashi, but she didn't want to enter a relation with him because she was married and that would violate a major social taboo in India.
- ३ Shashi's husband is a wealthy Indian business executive and quite proud of his English.
- १६ Shashi decided to invite all the English class members to the wedding and to give her final speech there.
- ७ Shashi got flustered (upset), spilled some coffee on some customers, and then rushed out of that deli.
- ९ Shashi made friends with the students in that class, gradually gaining more confidence in her English.
- ४ Shashi receives an invitation to travel to New York to help out with her niece's wedding.
- ५ She accepts that invitation, but feels out-of-place in New York City because of her English is so limited.
- २ She is an Indian housewife who sells *laddoos* (a type of Indian sweet) as a part-time job.
- १४ The final English class assignment was to give a 5-minute speech in English.

- ३ These things made some students uncomfortable, but all of the class members helped each other.
- ४ The teacher in Shashi's class, David, was candid (open) about his gay sexual identity.
- ५ This gave one student in the class, Udumbke, the courage to announce that he was also gay.
- ६ This is the story of an Indian woman named Shashi who visits the USA to help with a family wedding.
- ७ Unfortunately, Shashi's family wedding was scheduled at the same time as her final class.

As you might notice, more than one sequence is possible. Not insisting on only one “correct” answer is itself an apt metaphor cultural relativism. Moreover, some students will no doubt guess that what many of the Devangari numerals represent: ३ is quite similar to “2” and the Arabic version of the Devangari script is easily downloadable from many Internet sites. Guessing is fine, but if some students seem obsessed about the numbers rather than the content, gently encourage them to focus on the meaning of each sentence. In some classes, you might even ask students to paraphrase each sentence they receive. Japanese EFL students are generally not adept at paraphrasing (Oda & Yamamoto, 2007), and this review activity can provide such practice.

Before showing the video clip *English Vinglish Climax Speech*, it would probably be good to confirm that these vocabulary items are clear:

- |              |                       |               |                 |                     |
|--------------|-----------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| * adept      | * assert              | * stand up to | * get flustered | * metaphor(s)       |
| * judgmental | * put (somebody) down | * candid      | * underscore    | * idealize/idealise |

Next, play this video clip, pausing at the bracketed time frames to discuss the questions below:

1. [0:32] How did Shashi stand up to her husband in this video clip and assert herself?
2. [0:54] At first Shashi briefly switched from English into Hindi. This is known as “code-switching”. When do you switch from English into your native language? When is it appropriate?
3. [3:51] What metaphors did Shashi use to describe marriage? What metaphors would you use?
4. [3:51] What did Shashi underscore during her wedding speech?
5. [3:51] In your view, how often is equality actually achieved in marriage?
6. [3:51] To what extent do you feel Shashi has idealized marriage? Do people in Japan often do that?
7. [4:43] How did the audience respond to Shashi’s speech? What about her English teacher?

NOTE: Be sure to stop this video clip at the 4:43 time frame. The remainder of this clip is *not* in English.

## (9) Conclusion and Feedback

I recommend concluding this lesson by discussing the notion of *critical incidents* – events that can change life trajectories (Newfields, 2011). Outline how Shashi’s experience in a New York deli could be interpreted as a critical incident that prompted her to enroll in an English school, and gradually to improve her English. Not all critical incidents result in positive outcomes. Some in fact result in withdrawal or negative stereotyping (Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, & Klute, 2012).

Listed below are some possible final discussion questions for this film. Although teachers will likely wish to modify some of the questions on this list, these inquiries might be a useful starting point:

1. In what ways did the main character of this film change during her study abroad experience?
2. *For pre-departure classes:* How do you hope to change as a result of your study abroad experience?  
*For post-return classes:* How do you feel you have changed since starting your study abroad?
3. In what ways did Shashi embrace traditional cultural norms? In what ways did she challenge them?
4. If you met a person like Laurent, how would you respond?
5. Notions of what a “good teacher” sometimes vary from culture to culture.  
In your view, was David a good teacher? (Specify how so or how not.)
6. Did you learn from this film or the discussion activities? What questions remain unanswered?

If you want to foster reading/writing skills, it might be good to ask students to write a critique of this film. You could also extend this activity further by asking students to compare this film with any other study abroad-themed film. Many students will expect a specific word length for this assignment. The suggested word length should vary from depending on the proficiency level of each class.

At this point, some teachers may want to include a formal assessment of this activity, while others might prefer to garner informal impressions. Since this film could be used in so many different teaching contexts and for a wide variety of goals, each teacher should reflect on what sort of assessment would be most appropriate for their needs.

## Conclusion

This activity has described one way of using video clips from *English – Vinglish* to forefront issues pertaining to peripherization, identity, and divergent cultural norms that persons studying abroad for extended time frames are likely to experience. This famous Bollywood film can be a useful platform to critically examine a wide range of issues that overseas sojourners frequently confront. At the same time, this film involves a certain amount of idealization and it might actually reinforce some myths about study abroad. If this film is being used as part of a post-return program, it would be a good chance to reflect on how the experiences of participants overseas differed from this Bollywood drama. Can real life conflicts be resolved as easily as in a comedy drama?

Teachers working at conservative religious institutions and/or with very orthodox views might not feel comfortable with the themes concerning gender politics, linguistic hegemony, and race raised in this film. However, examining the narrative of one woman's struggle for dignity, equality, and better mastery of her environment may inspire participants to consider their own narratives and "rescript" some elements of their lives.

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## **Appendix A: Handout #1 – A Six-Step Procedure of Dealing with Some Linguacultural Misunderstandings**

Misunderstandings based on differences in language and culture have many possible reasons, and vary widely in intensity (degree). You may prefer to gloss over (ignore) relatively minor ones, but significant and/or persistent (ongoing) misunderstandings might need to be discussed, and hopefully resolved.

The following six-step procedure is based on guidelines published by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (2008) and also influenced by Toomey and Chung (2011). Although these guidelines will not function well for all overseas scenarios, they might be something to add to your "communication toolbox" when studying abroad.

### **Step 1: *Keep your cool – try not to respond emotionally.***

It is not uncommon to feel an instinctive urge to lash out (get angry) at blunders (mistakes) or perceived transgressions (wrong-doings), but this is seldom productive. Instead, detach yourself for a moment and try to observe what is going on around you. How are other people reacting? What can you learn from their body language? Even if others are using a language you are not fully familiar with, if you observe the environment closely you should be able to pick up on many non-verbal cues.

### **Step 2: *Tell the instigator promptly, clearly and calmly that you find their actions upsetting or that there is a problem.***

Sometimes a person who is upsetting you (or who has seriously misunderstood your intentions) does not even realize a problem exists - they might believe that the situation is perfectly "normal." At this stage your goal should be to inform such a person that indeed there is a problem. However, try to focus on the problematic *behavior* rather than the actual person. You might feel tempted to ridicule or attack a person who has made you uncomfortable. However, it is wiser to concentrate on the actual behavior, rather than the individual. If your response is directed to the person, chances are they will merely become defensive, and tensions will escalate (increase).

### **Step 3: *If the person apologizes, accept it.***

Recognize that nearly everyone makes mistakes, misunderstands important cues, or does foolish things from time to time. If that person makes an apology, thank them for doing so. Also, be candid with yourself and explore whether or not you might have contributed to the current misunderstanding. In some cases, the answer will be clearly "no." In other cases, however, it is possible that both parties failed to recognize important points and mutual apologies might be called for.

**Step 4: *If the person doesn't apologize, let it go once.***

After conflicts or misunderstandings occur, a common strategy is simply to avoid that person – or persons. If genuine reconciliation does not seem realistic, you may prefer to steer clear of any further conflict by simply keeping away from the individual(s) involved.

**Step 5: *If the offensive behavior happens again, action needs to be taken.***

If a problem is persistent, consult with a teacher or school counselor about what should be done. The important thing at this stage is to get expert advice. What often prevents some people from taking concrete steps towards resolution are feelings of shame or guilt. Disempowered populations - women, ethnic minorities, people lacking fluency in a target language - are particularly vulnerable and might be tempted to avoid taking pro-active steps towards resolving a problem.

**Step 6: *The action taken will depend on the parties involved - and on local contexts.***

The type of specific action that should be taken in a conflict will vary widely from situation to situation. Outcomes will also differ from culture to culture. Because study abroad participants are often regarded as transients (temporary tourists) by local authorities, they are often ignored. However, as Gladwell (2000) points out, periodically “tipping points” do occur and actions that were previously viewed as “acceptable” can later be seen as problematic – vice versa. In other words, as social contexts change so can our notions of what is appropriate. Many of the forms of disempowerment and stigmatization we saw in this film persist because the people who do it are in positions of power and think it is unproblematic and that they can get away with it. *English Vinglish* illustrates how one person can change the world around her.

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## **Appendix B: Handout #2 – Five Study Abroad Scenarios**

In Handout #1 a six-step procedure for resolving some types of conflict was outlined. Now let us consider how to apply those principles in five actual scenarios that sometimes occur during study abroad. First, read through each scenario in small groups to make sure you understand each context clearly. Then, discuss what you would actually do with your group members.

### **Scenario #1 - A Christian Homestay Dilemma**

Hayate's family is devoutly Buddhist and he grew up on a mainly vegetarian diet. A few times he has eaten meat, but never really liked it. Now he is doing a homestay with a born again Christian family in Australia. They are encouraging him to attend church with them on Sunday and feel it is a good way to “understand Western culture more deeply.” Now and then, they have also made a few disparaging (negative) remarks about Buddhism, suggesting that, “true salvation is only through Jesus.” Most of the time, however, they are pleasant and Hayate likes his host family in many respects. At times Hayate feels they are trying to convert him (make him a Christian, too). Their anti-Buddhist talk and repeated requests to attend church are starting to grate on (annoy) him. And although they do provide non-meat dishes for Hayate, the host mother lightly dismisses Hayate's vegetarian diet as nothing but a “foolish fad” that he will “eventually outgrow.” If you were in Hayate's situation, what would you do?

### **Scenario #2 - Too Much Sweet-Talk?**

Yuuna is interested in flamenco dancing and eventually hopes to open a dance studio in Japan. Now she is studying dance and Spanish in Seville, Spain. Anyway, Yuuna is enjoying most aspects of her overseas experience. One thing that makes her flustered (upset), however, is that some men come on to her too directly. On the street, she often hears men whistle at her. In particular, the man in an apartment near hers often says things like, “Ah, señorita - how gorgeous you look!” or “What an angel you are! I wish that I could kiss you!” At first she ignored such *piropos*\*. Yuuna already has a fiancé in Japan and is not romantically interested in any Spanish men. What do you should she do?

\*There is no exact word for this in Japanese and even the English translation - “flirtatious compliment” – does not convey the Spanish nuance precisely.

### **Scenario #3 - Up in Smoke?**

Kenshin is doing a homestay in Colorado, a place where marijuana is now legal for adults over age 21. He is enjoying his homestay experience, but surprised by the heavy smoking, beer drinking, and recreational drug use that happens on some weekends. Because English is not his native language, Kenshin has to work extra hard to keep up with her studies. He is receiving a study abroad scholarship and wants a high grade point average. His American friends have invited him to “get smashed” (use drugs) at a rock concert that is happening this weekend. Kenshin does not want to alienate (become distant from) his friends, but he is really not into the “heavy party scene” (lots of drinking or drugs). He dislikes tobacco smoke, only drinks a beer or two on occasion, and has no interest in taking any drugs. One classmate is urging Kenshin “loosen up and party more” – and suggesting if he spends the whole weekend studying he will become “a boring wimp” (uninteresting person). What would you do if you were Kenshin?

### **Scenario #4 - A Gender Bender**

Kei is experiencing a conflict between her private self and her public self. Privately, she describes herself in Japanese as 「X ジェンダー」, which is sometimes translated in English as “third gender.” Publicly, however, she pretends to be an “ordinary” Japanese college student. Only a few close friends know about her attraction to both men and women, and she prefers to remain “in the closet” (silent) about her sexual identity because soon she will start job hunting and Kei does not want to lessen her job prospects in any way. Now she is studying in Shanghai and most of the time she enjoys China. To improve her Chinese, recently she watched an award-winning movie called *Ciqing* 「刺青」 (2007) with her roommates. Translated as “*Spider Lilies*”, this 94-minute film made in Taiwan depicts a love affair between two women. After watching the movie, one of Kei’s roommates commented how “disgusting” it was to see the women physically attracted to each other. The other roommate agreed, adding that she, “wanted to vomit” (throw up) when those two women kissed. Kei has been silent so far. What do you think she should say?

### **Scenario #5 - Sex, Lies, and Study Abroad**

Ryuu is a third-year Japanese university student studying at a university in Ireland. By the middle of his first semester, he fell in love with a student from Brazil named Dorita who was at the same university. At first everything went well and they both used English to communicate with each other. Ryuu could express many of his emotions with Dorita, but at times he felt that she did not really understand him. Dorita considered Ryuu a nice guy, but a bit too stubborn, aloof (distant), and stiff (formal). She came to see him as a “partner for now” rather than a “serious marriage possibility.” Dorita also had a secret: she had a common STD known as Type 2 herpes. About 10% of people in Western Europe have this\*, and often the symptoms (signs) are mild – but reactions can vary widely. Dorita chose not to tell Ryuu about her disease because she was afraid of being rejected. Towards the end their study abroad, this couple made love. Shortly after that, Ryuu noticed an itchy sensation in his groins (below the belt). After visiting the campus clinic, Ryuu was told that he had herpes: a disease without any cure, but usually with mild symptoms. What should Ryuu say to Dorita? What should Dorita have done differently? What do you think should Ryuu do from now on?

\*information source: Looker, K. J., Garnett, G. P., & Schmid, G. P. (2008). An estimate of the global prevalence and incidence of herpes simplex virus type 2 infection. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 86 (10), 737-816.