

Using Films in the Multimedia English Class

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Abstract: A new educational reform runs through all foreign teaching courses, including audio-visual, speaking, reading, writing, and translating practices, in light of the significant, constant renovation and development of various knowledge and economy; talents of the compound, high quality, and heightened skills are urgently needed in society. Films (DVD, Mp3, etc.) play a vital role in foreign language labs in China using computers. More and more students are taking an interest in language acquisition, not just in learning new words or phrases or dialects or dialects or dialects. Now, students are getting more and more eager to learn new things and better understand the process of learning a new language. Because of this, foreign teachers face enormous challenges: First, how to turn audio-visual classrooms into a helpful teaching tool rather than just a kind of class amusement; and second, ways of getting students involved in class discussions and debates. How can this be done in a classroom setting when teaching listening and speaking skills to students? Helping children gain self-assurance in their ability to deal with the language can be a difficult task. How can classroom processes be designed based on student listening and speaking ability? For that reason, the objective of this paper is to provide students with some valuable and practical ways for increasing their level of self-confidence while learning English.

Keywords: Films, learning languages, and teaching English

Introduction

Teaching non-native speakers English as a second language has evolved. Researchers are no longer pleased with these technologies because of the rapid growth in students' communication ability. Thus, they are looking for other methods. Edison invented film in 1895. Many professions, including science, literature, and foreign language training, began using film almost immediately. Many linguists in the West have focused their attention on and explored this audio-visual technique that links sound and images. Beginners will benefit significantly from this form of instruction because it makes it easier for them to pick up new vocabulary and grammar points and recall the context in which they have used. Teachers from outside the United States who use the audio-lingual technique have expressed a desire to improve or modify the recognized methodology. As beneficial as memorization and pattern practice may be in the early stages of language acquisition, teachers are increasingly concerned about transitioning their students to the more creative use of language as they develop in proficiency. A potential shortcoming of the audio-lingual technique was its tendency to be dull and uninteresting (both students and teachers). Still, the audio-visual method may make the drills more fascinating by shifting their forms, offering a meaningful context, and employing visual aids," Newton (1974.31) wrote. As a result, resourceful teachers were often able to accomplish their goals." The audio-visual approach, which includes using films in the classroom, is a popular and effective teaching strategy for college English students. Traditional grammar-oriented and book-centered teaching approaches have been expected to be shattered by the new system. In the words of Westrand (1965, 111): "the sound film is a more effective medium than tape for modeling a foreign language and the accompanying behavioral patterns. The use of audio-visual approaches in language labs will increase. In addition, once a film has been seen, auditory exercises that employ the film's soundtrack and stimulate the memory of the visual component are common." Many linguists in China have turned to

audio-visual approaches as a result of western educational methods' influence. While the teacher is a spectator or organizer, the pupils are the show's stars. "The audio-visual approach can train students' sense of eye-sight, hearing, and movement (1979, 22)" is Wang Li's belief. With their vibrant colors, pulsing motion, and a wide range of shapes and sizes, Films provide the mind with new images and serve as a powerful inspiration for the imagination.

Discussions:

Advantages and disadvantages of film strips in English Teaching

When compared to the traditional way of teaching grammar through books, videos (or VCDs, DVDs, etc.) and computers have increasingly been seen as a challenge to the routine of language instruction, particularly the prevalent heavy reading in classrooms. The audio-visual technique does have some noticeable outcomes. There are several ways that students can learn a new language without waiting for their teachers to "feed" them. For starters, they can use audio-visual signals to help them understand the target language and learn about various cultures, including how native speakers interact with each other. As a result of the rich environment, students can engage in more spontaneous forms of learning, develop their critical thinking skills, and broaden their sphere of knowledge beyond what they study in the classroom. Second, teachers can organize students to express new ideas, generate their creative languages in various contexts, and discuss and negotiate with each other through film watching and making their text film and classroom film to arouse students' interest and confidence in language learning. Third, engaging videos help students' long-term memory and comprehension by providing more vivid and direct perceptions through the senses. However, the audio-visual method has its own set of limitations. Firstly, some films can run an hour or even two hours, which means that the audio-visual class becomes a simple entertainment class rather than a language learning process so that the pupils lose their clear, precise directions. They could be set up for failure if put to the test. Secondly, much of the language labs' equipment fails to function during class time. Another consideration is that not every film strip on a particular subject or language is appropriate for pupils. As a final point, not all film strips depict the target culture and language in an authentic manner, which might lead to learners' misinterpretation of the cultures.

The selection of film strips

"Effective language teaching is responsive to the needs and interests of the individual learner. Effective language learning is an active process, in which the learner takes increasing responsibility for his or her progress (Mitchell,1994: 38f)." In order to motivate students to express their opinions freely and arouse their interests for learning languages in classroom, the first important step is to select the appropriate film strips for students' interest, participation, challenge and instruction, which must include variety of topics, viewpoints and literary styles. Therefore, the most important step for teachers is to take into account the learners' needs and the teacher's training purposes.

Teachers should take concrete measures to consider the objectives of the film class and then to involve themselves into the teaching practice of the course. Each course has its own features and particular teaching aims to follow, so different and distinct films will be extracted out of personal interest and teaching syllabus. Of course, teachers must spend time and energy finishing the hard task. Take *The woman Who Would Not Tell* (College English Book III Unit 3) for instance, in the first place, the teacher should introduce the background of the Civil War, the culture of the Yankee. So we can excerpt the certain chapter about the target culture from the film *GONE WITH THE WIND*. In the period class, the cultural features may be the most necessary point.

Meanwhile, the language of the film strips should be selected carefully, which is neither difficult nor easy. If the language is too difficult for students' comprehension, they will lose their confidences and interests in listening and understanding the characters and the patterns. Next, the duration of the film strips is another problem to be considered for teachers. The film is too long, the course will be involved in entertaining class; as a result, the students don't make full use of the hours study spontaneously with the target task which probably leads to the failure in achieving the planned, expected teaching effect. The last point, Chinese caption is avoided which is thought to interfere with the students' attempt to master the target language except for the situation in which some Chinese could be used to help the students understand complex English sentences and abstract concepts. Of course, there are many difficulties in face of both students and teachers. For students, it is very difficulty to obtain the meaning of the original film without any Chinese. For

teachers, in order to make the film class successful, they have to endure great pressures from films' preparations and assignments to its guidance, inspects and exams etc. most of them are invisible and innumerable.

The ways of using films teaching

Films are a teaching medium of connecting watching with listening. Before class, teachers must have a general instructional design. This design mainly includes three aspects (1) what to study (2) which process and materials to use

(3) how to know students' reaction? Instructional Design is such a process as

The Instructional Design is put forwards by Jerolde E. Kemp (American). The purpose of the film teaching class is to help students to explore thematic subtleties in their classroom activities and to get much information of the target language. So in film teaching class, teachers should arrange in the following different ways: explanation to some key words and idioms and patterns related to the film; prediction of the plot of the film based on the given title; introduction of a general idea about the cultural background; discussion of the theme on the film; expression of the different opinions and performance of imitating the characters in pairs or in their groups. In the class, teachers should try their best to let students be in an imaginary and creative world. This can be conducted as following:

Explanation is the first step to direct the students' learning language in the class correctly. The key words and idioms are very important for them to understand the film about the text. For example, in the text "Going Home" taken from Unit Ten of Intensive Reading Book I <College English >, the teacher may guide the students to guess the key words related to the title and the given picture in the text. The words put forward by students concern the various feelings of the characters, the description of the home's environment and the reason of going home. In the meanwhile, they are asked to make up sentences or stories orally, using the words and idioms they have thought of. Through this kind of practice, the students have reviewed their known language knowledge and improved their communicative abilities and team-work spirits. In this case, teachers play the American pop song *Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree* which was very popular in the United States in the mid-nineteen seventies. There is certainly something in this story that appeals to the students. So teachers pick out more words and idioms from the film and the song which the students may not be familiar with, such as "approach, painfully, root stum, vanish, retreat, exclaim, come through" etc and require them to make up sentences and guess the story once again. After the repeated exercises, the students may have the preliminary understanding of the film. The practice of making up sentences and stories enlarges the students' vocabulary and gradually form their creativity together with ability to use the language. This classroom activity will fire the students' imagination and let them create a world or series of situations that might have been.

Prediction of the title and new vocabulary

In the step, teachers may play the Japanese film *Yellow Handkerchiefs* with no sound (only giving the tableau), which also borrowed the plot from the story. After finishing the film, the teachers should encourage his students to reason out those aspects of the film that contribute to our feeling that events portrayed are really taking place while watching the film. Have students compare their experience of space and time in their dreams and their experience of space and time in watching the film. Ask students to make judgments about the human conduct portrayed in the programs. Judgments might be guided by questions like the following: *Where were the young people going? How was Vingo dressed? Why were the young people on the bus interested in Vingo? What do you think the young people would have said to Vingo if there had been no handkerchiefs on the tree? What do you think of Vingo's wife?* In the upper elementary grader, such questions can be basis for more formalized student's debates. Teachers can divide students into groups and discuss the film and express their own opinions about the film.

Introduction of the cultures and civilization of the countries

Cultural awareness has been seen as a by-product of learning a language. In order to understand language fully and use it fluently, learner need not only linguistic, pragmatic, discourse and strategic competence but also socio-cultural and world knowledge, as some areas of language do reflect culture. This applies to the idiomatic level, as well as to syntax and morphology, but seems particularly important in relation to avoiding socio-pragmatic failure at discourse level, e.g. how to start and conduct conversations, turn-taking, turn-keeping and turn-giving, topic nomination, topic change, etc. Once again teachers are faced with fresh

challenges. The need is to incorporate new style materials and activities to meet such demands. Thus teachers' task is to activate their schemes and help them to associate the new information they get from the films with their past knowledge. For instance, in the text "Going Home" <<College English Book I>>, teachers introduce this is a true story, which appeared in the New York Post in 1971 and give some general questions that will highlight the cultural issues from the film, e.g. why were the young people on the bus going to Florida? Here teachers illustrate the cultural background of the "Florida and the Sun Belt? The film has a subtropical climate and is ideal for a winter vacation. From November to March northerners and easterners come to lie on the warm, sandy beaches of Miami and the other resorts along the coast. And that is why the boys and girls in the film were so eager to leave the "grey", "cold" city of New York to vacation in Florida. Therefore, learners need to be aware of the cultural dimension of language. Culture learning "enables learners to see and manage the relationships between themselves and their own cultural beliefs, behaviors and meanings, as expressed in a foreign language". (Byram 1997: 12)

Discussion about the thematic issue of the film

The learning process is conceived of as one of learning through doing. Learning is more effective if the students are actively involved in the process. In this class activity, the film can be shown again with the sound track sent through one of the audio channels. These visual aids can be used "live" in the classroom. After viewing the whole film, we divide students into groups of four or five in each and discuss their previous prediction and the main ideas of the film and relationship between the theme and the title of the film. One representative from each group may report the result of their discussions. This method abandons the traditional teaching plan in China of simple language points about the text, but helps lead to the context directly. On the basis of students' independent thinking and analyzing, teachers, as a guide, join in the students' activities, use the obtained information to give value questions which endorse learners' curiosity, creativity. Thus teachers may organize students to discuss the plot and character. This activity may be very interesting to students because every student will have his or her own ideas about the plot and the relationship between the characters. Take the text "Going Home" as an example again, teachers may give some specific questions as guidance, namely, *why didn't Vingo's wife write to him for three and a half years? What do you think the young people would have said to Vingo if there had been no handkerchiefs on the tree? What do you think of Vingo's wife? What do you think of the ending of the story?* In animated discussion, there is no need to ask students to reach any agreement, they may make a compromise or just stick to their opinions. Through the students' discussion and comments, teachers may observe some problems: students may include some details and analyze the characters and summarize the main ideas, but they cannot understand the deep meaning of the story. In fact, the story describes the psychological changes of Vingo: from the moment when he was out of the prison, his wife accepted him immediately. Therefore, in teaching process, teachers should point out this key understanding so that students can use the language knowledge from the text to conclude and then fulfill the purpose of language production. Group discussion provides students with enough opportunities to practice, and learn how to use the target language.

Building confidence in listening and speaking

As we know, group discussion is a very good method to train students' abilities in listening and speaking, and their team spirits, however, not every student takes part in the activity. Many students are anxious about listening to a foreign language. Eastman (1991) suggests that "the reasons for this tendency include anxiety, the expectation that the listener needs to understand every word, transfer from a word-by-word reading comprehension strategy.....". So we should make use of every chance of helping our students to develop confidence in dealing with a range of the films and speakers, and with variations in the speed of delivery. An important factor in the development of confidence is how to grade the tasks throughout a film. The first group is to do with the speaker, to make up dialogue according to the visual or printed materials; the second group is responsible for the content of the film and the language factors, the formal structure of the film, and the prior knowledge required to infer meaning; the third group is to do the listener, and the degree of response required; the fourth group is in charge of summarizing and analyzing the character which they are interested in. Therefore, in class, the teachers must make a judicious selection which involves a balance of these factors, for example, just picking out some basic information such as what the speakers are talking

about and whether they agree and so on. In contrast, a monologue with simple language could require more detailed answers.

Confidence is also built through the most useful and simplest English. The learners might be encouraged to use the simple English. The following example <*Family Album in USA*> (P.152-163) provides a good way of guidelines to assist learners in listening to materials and encouraging them to be more responsible for their learning and independence.

Role-play of film In developing language skills, students inevitably develop skills which can be applied in order areas of learning. Imitation and dramatization are found to be a good way which offers advanced learners opportunities to present themselves in role-play. According to Johnstone (1988: 12) “the gradual introduction of information exchange based on role play and simulation.” The activity usually also has laboratory tapes, and textbooks. The most advanced

photographic techniques are combined with excellent teaching presentations in some of these films. An important feature of these teaching films is that they involve the students both passively and actively. The students should be induced to respond, imitate and reply during the performance of the film, not merely watching it passively. This active involvement is the key to successful teaching films. For instance, in “Going Home” again, teachers may ask each pair to write a dialogue between Vingo and the girl by themselves, or the dialogue may alternatively be given through dictation.

Teachers may give students five minutes or more to prepare the dialogue in class or after class. Another method is to give the students 5-10 minutes to discuss what might happen to Vingo when he got home. Students are encouraged to bring their imagination into full play. During the whole performing process, the teacher only act as a guide or a consultant offering help whenever needed. After students’ performance, she or he comments on their activities and languages, so as to encourage them to do better. Of course, mistakes are inevitable, but they are taken as sources of feedback, which are beneficial to the future teaching. So Mitchell(1994: 38f)said “ Learners trying their best to use the target language creatively and unpredictably are bound to make errors; this is a normal part of language learning , and constant correction is unnecessary, and even counterproductive.” An ability to learn from one’s mistakes is the important skills required for future continual language development.

The assessment of learners of a foreign language and the assessment techniques are overtaken by a series of events. Use of language and oral proficiency grow in status. The aims of examination in learning process is desirable and that there is a need for the inclusion of thought-provoking texts and contexts which allow students to perform tasks that make appropriate cognitive demands and emphasizes creativity, moving learners on from single-word and short-phrase transactions and interactions. So the ensuring examinations lead to learners being compelled to develop skills and to undergo different learning processes. Imitation, repetition and therefore exposure to the language become the buzz words. For the invisible part of the same curriculum, the scope of the invisible teaching such as materials, reference books and exercises, etc. should be basically laid down and unified; the forms and frequency of guidance should be set down; periodical tests or exams are necessary; and students should all be tested finally in form of drawing samples among the question stuffs which is level test. Or teachers demand students to summarize what they have learned on the film and text by speaking or by writing, and to exchange their own experience from learning practice, in order to better study and explore the potentiality of learning.

Conclusions

Audio-visual aids are the most effective means of making clear the meaning of the film or the text such as language points and cultures and so on. They also provide an excellent stimulus for oral work and strengthen the students’ abilities to communicate in English. Visual forms make important events in students’ lives. The color, shape and arrangement of objects in stories and in ads have a profound effect on behavior. Visual forms can shape and express the feelings of people of all cultures. Visual aids make it possible to provide the students with adequate information for answering questions without recourse to his native language. Teachers should help students become aware of the many ways.

The films teaching can make the students more independent and provide improved motivation for them. They can better understand the cultural background of the target language to be learned. The teacher will do

less “live” presentation of factual material to classes of students, less drill, but more advisory, consultative, and corrective work with individual students. During the teaching, the machines are willing slaves, cheaper and more reliable than human beings. Therefore, in English class, teacher’s primary role is the selection of materials and the creation of an appropriate atmosphere. Of course, the above-discussed methods or activities are not all inclusive to some extent, but students are fond of them, which encourage their imagination, creativity and a long memory. Meanwhile, students benefit a lot from communicative activities. Moreover, the potential of films teaching in foreign language must be endless. These practical suggestions on films teaching are worthy of our further discussion and research in the future.

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