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How to Utilize Films in Language Learning Classes?

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Abstract

Although the initial purpose of making various audiovisual mass media programs is to entertain various audiences, the pedagogical value embedded in different programs such as films for language learning is worth considering. The use of films to motivate and encourage language learners has been emphasized by many researchers. In the same line, various films can be utilized as a source of authentic language input for language learning. Accordingly, the present paper aims at introducing some simple steps towards the better use of films in developing language proficiency in conversation courses. In this regard, the advantages of using films as a source of authentic language input are considered first. Then, the role of the teacher is explored and some teaching suggestions are offered. Moreover, an extensive list of some criteria for selecting various parts of different films which can best help language learners enhance the language proficiency will also be introduced. The paper will conclude by introducing some teaching tips in order to enhance the application of films in language learning classrooms.

Key Words: Films, Authentic language input, Language learning

Introduction

In recent years, a great tendency towards the use of various audiovisual programs as sources of authentic language input for language learning has gained a great attention among the

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researchers in second/foreign language learning/acquisition. It is a well-known fact that various audiovisual materials as sources of authentic language input are a great help in stimulating and facilitating the learning of a foreign/second language. Besides, various audiovisual programs have the potential to provide the necessary language input for language learning.

Nunan (1999) defines authentic language materials as spoken or written language materials that have been produced in real communication. In fact, these spoken or written language materials are not specifically produced for the very purpose of language teaching. Nunan (1999) further highlights the assumption that authentic language input can be extracted from many different sources including TV and radio broadcasts such as news, movies, songs, soap operas, and comedies, recorded conversations, meetings, and newspapers. Gilmore (2007) also defines authentic language input as the language conveying a real message which is produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience.

In the same line, films as a source of authentic language input has the potential to provide enjoyable language learning opportunities for students if the teacher chooses appropriate length films, either complete ones or segments, which are purposeful and tailored to students' learning needs and proficiency level.

In this regard, Chapple and Crutis (2000) conducted a study on the employment of various films as a source of authentic and suitable teaching materials in content-based instruction approaches in Southeast Asia. The study underscored how motivating materials such as films along with content-based instruction can facilitate language learning. Films have many cross-cultural values, provide outstanding basis for the improvement of critical thinking skill, provide a rich source of content for language learners, and offer linguistic diversities (Chapple and Crutis, 2000). These features of films along with the motivating feature facilitate language learners' oral communication. Related studies were also conducted by Ryan (1998), Heffernan (2005), and Gebhardt (2004) focusing on enhancing motivation and language learning through the utilization of films in language classrooms.

Films in video format should not be regarded as merely a peripheral 'extra' in a listening class; on the contrary, they can function as the core content and become an integral part of the curriculum (Sommer, 2001). Appropriate and creative exploitation of movie videos can reveal their potentials in fostering the acquisition of listening skills (Eken, 2003). In the same line, films have the potential to provide exposures to the real language uttered in authentic settings and the culture in which the foreign language is spoken (Stempleski, 1992). Besides, they assist the learners' comprehension by enabling the learners to listen to exchanges and see such visual supports as facial expressions and gestures simultaneously (Allan, 1985; Sheerin, 1982), which may improve their insights into the topic of the conversations.

The point should be highlighted that an instructor's initial attempts to implement the teaching of films in the classroom may be overwhelming. However, with each successive attempt, by using modified guidelines and increasing teaching experience, films turn into rewarding materials for

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both teachers and students. When language learners are provided with well-structured tasks and activities designed to promote active viewing and stimulate involvement for making the most of learning opportunities of movies, there is no doubt that feature films are the most stimulating and enjoyable learning materials for the E-generation.

In view of the above, the present paper initially was set to provide a guideline for those teachers and practitioners who are interested in utilizing various authentic materials particularly films in their language classes such as conversation courses.

The advantages of using films in a language class

There are some advantages of using films in a language class. Films can be an effective platform for the language learners to be immersed in the culture or way of life of the target community. It can broaden the geographical knowledge about the target country, give exposure to the sociolinguistic issues, and also educational issues in the target country.

Besides, films may also provide strong motivation for students to learn the target language and culture because students can learn in more interesting ways compared to traditional class activities. Films can furnish background knowledge of the target community as well, as noted by some students. Some concepts of films are easily understood by watching films rather than by using other media of teaching such as reading materials or books. In addition, it is a more interesting way to learn since it is a kind of entertainment as well.

Films as a source of authentic language input

The design

Today, many language teachers use various audiovisual programs in their classes to spice things up. Among the various audiovisual mass media programs films are favored more. Language teachers utilize various films in the conversation classes with different techniques. Some use subtitled films while others believe that films should be used without subtitle. However, some of the reasons that teachers may use films as a source of authentic language input in their classroom can be:

1. Films introduce students to material that uses authentic language. This allows the students to have an opportunity for rich and varied exposure to authentic English without going to a native language country.
2. Using films allows the teachers to bring the voices of other English speakers into the classroom. This helps students build confidence through the practice of listening to native speakers.
3. Films motivate students to learn English, especially to listen to the dialogs in movies.

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4. Films reinforce students' understanding of English context-bound expressions.
5. Films help language learners to learn new vocabulary and idioms.
6. The dialogues in the films are excellent examples of authentic language in context and become a model for student production.
7. Films introduce the students to new vocabulary and expressions set in a natural context.
8. Films can be used to generate ideas or topics to discuss in class.
9. Films extend the classroom and provide a window into the target culture. Because language and culture are interconnected, understanding the social context of language is extremely important. This can be used as a tool for teaching students how to communicate more effectively in the real world.
10. Films give visual support for students that help learners interpret the language easier.

After using and experimenting with films in the classroom, the results clearly show the numerous benefits they hold. In addition to assisting teachers as they introduce new language, films motivate and engage the language learners and support their language learning process.

What films to select

One of the essential factors to be considered in utilizing various films as a source of authentic language input is the choice of films that should be based on some criteria that can serve the purposes of the teacher. Accordingly, some important criteria for selecting the appropriate films or segments of various films can be:

1. The students' language proficiency; for intermediate to low level students, films with English subtitles are preferable.
2. The usage of language: films using colloquial language are more suitable for higher level modules.
3. Choose stories that are relevant to students' lives.
4. Ask the students about their preferences regarding different films.
5. Choose stories that motivate the students.
6. Use various broadcasts that provide exposure to various accents and cultures.

7. Choose stories that are proficiency-level appropriate; political and science related stories are often too difficult for many students to understand.
8. Use stories that lend themselves to many learning activities and the integration of the four skills.
9. Cue the video ahead of time.

Helpful Teaching Tips

After investigating the pedagogical value of films and outlining some of the criteria for selecting and preparing films, the following several teaching tips that will help make teaching with films easier and more enjoyable for both the teachers and the language learners should be taken into consideration:

1. Offer students a choice in the film content you show in class. Take an inventory of their interests and then bring films that reflect those interests.
2. Let students initiate in private-practice before asking them to respond to your questions regarding the film story.
3. Prepare extension activities to fill the space between the first and last students' finishing an activity.
4. Get feedback from the students: It is important for teachers to get feedback from students regarding their comfort level on the various four skills assignments, processes, and procedures used in conjunction with the film stories.
5. Ask your students regularly about their feelings about activities in class. You could give them a formal feedback form to fill out or ask them informally to give you a thumb up or a thumb down.
6. All four skills activities should include opportunities for students to play an active role in their own learning. When preparing for a task, help students become aware of any relevant strategy, from their own language, that might help them to perform the task successfully. For example, you may want to ask the students to think about positive interpersonal skills in their culture before they interact with or participate in small groups when talking about the film story.
7. Recycle, recycle, and recycle! Language learners need to see and use the language numerous times before it is acquired. Thus, it is essential that teachers reuse and include language taught in previous lessons in their current lesson. Thematic units are a useful method of recycling language in any lesson.

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Conclusion

Access to a wide range of audiovisual mass media programs such as films is getting very easy for all the people around the world with everlasting technological developments. Many researchers have underscored the pedagogical values of various audiovisual mass media programs to be incorporated into language learning. Among various programs, films turn out to be an effective teaching device to develop the language learners' language skills and stimulate their imagination simultaneously. Their capacity to arouse the learners' motivation and their potential to engage the learners in a variety of fruitful activities related to aural perception in the target language can scarcely be denied.

The purpose of the present study was to shed more light on the studies which emphasize the pedagogical value of utilizing films as a source of authentic language input in developing language proficiency. The activities and suggestions laid out here have a lot of room for improvement, but we hope this short paper is a useful tool for any language teacher who wishes to bring in another perspective and possibly more depth into his/her classroom. Using various films in the classroom allows teachers to open the classroom door and invite the sources of authentic language input through the use of audiovisual mass media in, thus, benefiting the language learners on many levels.

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