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## The Use of Films in the Teaching of English in India

Rohit S. Kawale, M.A., M. Phil., Ph.D.

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### Abstract

Indian students face a number of problems in learning the English language and in studying English literature. They do not get sufficient exposure to the language in real communication situations. Therefore, they have an insufficient competence in English.

In general, there are a number of advantages of using various audio-visual aids in teaching to provide stimulus variation to students. It is possible to screen some English films for the benefit of students. The films based on texts prescribed in the syllabus can be screened. Other films can also be used for different purposes. This method can make students acquainted with British and American English pronunciation and also with the culture reflected in English literature. Therefore, screening of English films should be made a part of the teaching of the English language and literature in India.

### Introduction

There will certainly be agreement among teachers of English in India over the observation that Indian students have a large number of problems in learning the English language and studying English literature at various levels, right from the school level to the postgraduate level. It is

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necessary to make the teaching of English as learner-centred as possible. It is also necessary to help Indian students get acquainted with the culture reflected in English literature. This article aims at showing how films can be used in the teaching of the English language and English literature, and also sharing some experiences of doing so.

### **Problems of Indian Students in Learning English**

Teachers of English in India experience a number of problems in teaching English, their nature depending on the students' background and their level of study. English is not merely a *subject* to be studied, but it is basically a language. Competence in a language depends on the speaker's exposure to the language.

Students from the rural area do not have sufficient exposure to English, as they read or hear English only in the classroom. There are no real life situations in the rural area, in which the students *have to* communicate in English. It is also possible that some of them become teachers of English in rural schools later.

As teachers themselves do not have sufficient exposure to English in real life situations of communication, they may pass on the insufficient competence in English to their students. Therefore, students do not develop a sufficiently good competence in English. There are also students who are better at English grammar and have a better English vocabulary, but have problems about English pronunciation.

Therefore, they may have difficulties in understanding spoken English and may also be unintelligible to others in spoken communication. Language is not used in a vacuum, but it is closely linked with the society and the culture in which it is used. Indian students, in general, have many difficulties in understanding English literature, as they are not acquainted with the culture reflected in English literature.

### **Need for Teaching Methods to Overcome the Problems**

If there are problems in teaching English to Indian students, there is a need for teaching methods that can help teachers and students of English overcome these problems. The teaching methods should have the following features.

- 1) They should give students more and varied exposure to the English language.
- 2) They should be more learner-centred and should interest the students.
- 3) They should not only equip the students for communication in *written* English, but also enable them to communicate in *spoken* English. They should help students get acquainted with English pronunciation.

4) They should help students get acquainted with the English culture.

5) Educationists find that appealing only to one kind of stimulus makes teaching-learning monotonous and less interesting. If the teacher provides some variation in the stimuli that are appealed to, teaching and learning can become more interesting. There is certainly an important place for the use of audio-visual aids in teaching. With advanced technology, various types of equipment to be used for using audio-visual aids are more easily available and more affordable. They are now easier to use in the class. The teaching methods should properly incorporate the use of audio-visual aids like films.

### **The Use of Films in the Teaching of English**

As mentioned above, it has comparatively become easier and more affordable to use audio-visual aids in teaching. Equipment such as CDs, DVDs, CD/DVD player, computer/laptop, TV set, LCD projector can now be more easily available in colleges/universities. Copies of English films are also more easily available in India. There are various purposes for which films can be used in the teaching of English. The following are some of them.

#### **a) Films based on prescribed texts**

Films based on literary texts can be available. Especially in case of texts prescribed in the syllabi, screening of films based on them can be very useful. For instance, films based on many of Shakespeare's plays, such as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are now available. There are some Hindi adaptations of literary texts or adaptations in another Indian language, too, such as *Tee Phulrani*, which is a Marathi adaptation of Shaw's play *Pygmalion* and the film *Bride and Prejudice*, which is based on Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Whatever aspects of the text that students are unable to visualise, such as the geographical conditions, items of food/clothing, customs, conventions and appearance of the characters, can be seen in the film. This can help students understand the text better. This is especially experienced in case of texts from a different culture, texts written long ago (such as Shakespeare's plays) etc.

#### **b) Films based on literary works**

Selection of films for screening need not be restricted to films based on texts prescribed in the syllabi. There can be films based on literary works which can be interesting to students, films on British/American history, films on Christian mythology or films that can enrich their understanding of literature. Films like *Helen of Troy*, *Ten Commandments* and *The Da Vinci Code* are examples that illustrate the point.

#### **c) Screening films for acquainting students with varieties like British and American English**

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It is necessary to acquaint students with English pronunciation in different varieties of English, such as British English and American English. If films are to be used for this purpose, popular British and American films on themes interesting to students can also be used. The film *My Fair Lady*, based on Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, can be screened for introducing the concept of regional dialect of English and also for introducing Phonetics to students.

#### **d) Films on certain themes**

When a text on a certain theme is to be taught to students, it can be helpful to screen films on that theme. If a film on that text itself is available, such *Train to Pakistan*, it is certainly very effective. But, films on that theme, though not based on that text, can also be helpful, like films on the theme of partition, even a TV serial like *Tamas*. Similarly, films on world war or the massacre of Jews in Germany can be screened for teaching modern war poems.

#### **For Other Purposes As Well**

Depending on the requirements of the syllabus or the text and the class to be taught, it is possible to use films for some other purposes, too. When a film based on a prescribed text is screened, it is better for students to be acquainted with the text, at least to some extent. It can also be beneficial for students to keep copies of the text handy at the time of screening, or even following the text to some extent in case of texts like Shakespeare's plays.

The teacher can also hold another activity in the class along with the screening of a film. Students can discuss how the text has been treated in the film. They can discuss the limitations or advantages of the film medium that they have observed, as compared with literature. The interpretation of the text reflected in the film can also be discussed. For instance, in a film based on *Hamlet*, the director has shown that Claudius and Polonius watch and eavesdrop on a conversation between Hamlet and Ophelia, which Shakespeare has not indicated. This is the director's interpretation, which can provide a possible line of thinking to students. They can also discuss how far the film has helped them in their understanding of the text.

#### **Conclusion**

There are various problems that Indian students face in learning English. It is possible to help them solve the problems to some extent by making use of films in teaching English language and literature. There are various purposes that can be served by screening different kinds of films. It is for the teacher to identify the students' problems and decide what kind of films can be screened, and it is for the teacher make the selection of films. It is always advisable to screen at least those films which are based on the texts prescribed in the syllabi.

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