Teacher's Role in Using Movies as Instruments in English Classes for Junior College Students

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Abstract: Nowadays, many English teachers choose to use movies as instruments to help learners improve their English skills. Using movies in class offers a wide, active and vivid visual situation and enables students to experience personally on the scene. It provides students with a shortcut to know foreign countries and cultures which helps them to improve listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating skills. However, in junior college student's English class, when our learners are lack of self-learning ability, the disadvantages of using movies often take dominance and the advantages are not fully realized. It needs teachers' guidance to help students to learn how to improve their English ability through movies and develop the ability of self-learning. Thus, teacher's role is of crucial importance when movies are used in class. This paper first review and analyze theories related to teaching language with movies in class. Then this paper analyzes the roles that teachers play in junior college students' English class. To make the lesson efficient, a teacher should be an advocate, designer, organizer, leader, explainer, assessor, operator and researcher. At last the author gives some suggestions of the activities related to using movies as an instrument in class. It is hoped the findings of this paper may help teachers with the preparation of the lesson and make class time more effective and efficient.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, many English teachers choose to use movies as a teaching tool to help learners improve their English skills. Using movies in English classes has many advantages. It offers a wide, active and vivid visual situation, and at the same time it enables students to experience personally on the scene. When they are watching and listening to movies, they contact language materials closely, and improve their English skills with the help of series of teaching activities such as discussion, question, repetition, performance, etc. However, things might be different for a junior college student who does not have much experience on self-learning. For junior college students who just finish high school education, they are not aware that watching movies in class is actually a teaching and learning process because of the lack of self-learning ability. The advantages of using movie as a teaching tool cannot be realized completely without proper guiding of the teacher. Actually, the fact is that most of the time, English teachers of junior college students choose movies freely without concerning the situation of the students and they become the equipment controllers only. There are not enough background introductions, explanation of difficult words and expressions or effective activities related to the movies. Students only have fun during the class without learning anything. It is a huge waste of class time. Teachers do not know the demands for students to improve English listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating skills clearly.

This study was aiming to explore teacher's role in using movies as instruments in English classes for junior college students. In this paper, it will integrate theory of motivation, context, learners and teachers and analyze the teacher's roles when using movies in class and then give my suggestions of some activities related to the movies. Hopefully, it will help teachers with the preparation of a lesson. With the conclusion of this thesis, teachers may know better about the needs of students so that the class could be more efficient.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Characteristics of Using Movies in Class

As an art form, movie is a series of individual motion pictures. People use cameras, animation techniques and special effects to produce movies by recording images. Due to their strong expressive forms, movies have great popularity among people all over the world. Movies are created by specific cultures and in return they affect cultures. Film is considered to be an important art form, a source of popular entertainment and a powerful method for educating - or indoctrinating - citizens. The visual elements of cinema give motion pictures a universal power of communication.

2.2 The Functions of Using Movies in Class

Movies compose a comprehensive content, such as languages, words, sound, and images etc. They can satisfy many different needs, such as entertainment, artistic appreciation and self-expression. The functions of movies have been discovered and utilized during its more than one hundred years' development. However, people realize that movies have other great potential other than just for entertainment. In terms of education, English language education especially, movies are effective teaching tools in class. When teachers use movies as a teaching tool, they combine words and sentences with their specific performance to provide students with three-dimensional, audio-visual and authentic learning experiences[10].

When teachers consider using movies for teaching, case analysis is an obvious use of movies and perhaps the first usage they may think of. Students develop their analytical skills through watching and discussing movies or movie segments which work well as a case. Rich discussions and reinforcement of concepts and theories come from case analysis approach of some movies using in class. "Thanks to the typical features, complex editing, special effects, integrated music and other unique qualities, modern films can create strong viewer experiences"[11]. Movies motivate English learners to use eyes, ears, brain and mouth to response actively to the teacher in class. It creates an atmosphere that helps students quit themselves of the shackles of mother tongue[8]. Thus, using movies as a teaching tool breaks through the traditional way of English teaching.

2.3 The Advantages of Using Movies in Class

2.3.1 Movies as Audio-Visual Aids.

The efficiency of English learning and the development of English ability depend on understanding and memory in a great degree. Seen from cognitive psychology perspective, using both audio and visual measures to improve memory is much more effective than just using audio or just using visual measures[3]. As is mentioned above, movie is a combination of languages, words, sound and images, which makes verbal and nonverbal communication work together comprehensively. Students obtain sound and video at the same time, which helps their abstract thinking and imaginary thinking cooperate, so they can make full use of the functions of their brain.

Furthermore, audio-visual aids help students concentrate on the process of learning[5]. According to pedagogical psychology, if learners can concentrate while they are studying or being trained, their brain will have a most clear reflection of the content of what they are learning. Audio-visual aids of movies transfer vivid, clear and complete information into students, which creates an exciting point on their brain. A high level of concentration inspires students' desire to learn actively[8].

There is a study, conducted by Baltova[1] in 1994, related to the audio-visual aids of teaching with movies. The subjects were from two eighth-grade classes studying French for about 600 hours in Southern Ontario. Students received four different treatments for the same material, a brief French story: 13 for the "sound-only" condition, 12 for the "video-and-sound" condition, 15 for the "silent viewing" condition, and 13 for the "no-story" condition. At the end of the study, students were given a comprehension test. Results show that students performed better in the "video-and-sound" group. Baltova[1] points out "The findings of the first experiment strongly

supported the informative power of the visual channel". Thus, audio-visual aids help students to interpret the given materials and enhance their comprehension.

2.3.2 Movies as Authentic Materials.

Authenticity has become more important in language teaching in recent years. Authentic language application happens under real living circumstances. As Kramsch[6] states, "Authentic texts require that participants' respond with behaviors that are socially appropriate to the setting, the status of the interlocutors, the purpose, key genre, and instrumentality of exchange, and the norms of interaction agreed on by the native speaker."

Though the languages in movies have scripts, they are made to sound as natural as possible to native speakers. Thus, there is no doubt that the language in movies can represent authentic language. Movies are bridges connecting the languages used in the real world and the classroom, which make it possible for students to experience various accents and idiomatic ways of speaking in both formal and informal settings. In China, most English learning materials in textbooks are artificially made to be slow and clear for pedagogical applications. However, when students face authentic language which is used naturally in daily life or work, they have difficulties in communicating appropriately and confidently with native speakers of English. Movies can present language materials without reinterpretation of English teachers or other people, so students can learn directly from original speech.

In addition to Baltova's study in 1994, Weyers conducted a study related to the authentic effects of using videos in language teaching[9]. Two groups were in Weyer's study: 17 subjects in the control group and 20 subjects in the experimental group. The subjects were college students in the second semester learning Spanish. The treatment of this study was that students in the experimental group watched two episodes per week of a soap opera, which was taped off-air with the commercials and was regarded as authentic materials, but not specifically designed for language learners. All the subjects were given a pretest in the beginning of the semester, and a posttest in the end. The statistical result showed that students in the experimental group did significantly better than those in the control group. It proved that the using of authentic videos helped the students in listening to Spanish[7].

2.3.3 Movies as Motivators.

A commonly known interpretation of motivation is the division of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: the former refers to learners' inner expectations to learn not for rewards or compliments from others, while the latter indicates learners learn for outside reinforcement or avoiding punishments, but not for themselves[2]. Movies can serve as reinforcement in classroom and can also be motivators for students. Movies create an attractive learning atmosphere which motivates students to participate into the class process actively. Moreover, movies which were originally made for entertainment will provide students with enjoyable experiences. Previous research reported that students brought the same expectation of having fun into the classroom as they would if they were in a movie theatre or at home. Although students initially do not understand everything, they achieve a sense of accomplishment when they have understood materials that have been directed to a native-speaking language audience.

Chiang conducted a study in which students were asked to introduce their favorite movies[4]. 96 students were assigned into one of the four groups at the beginning of the semester, and they had about two months to prepare the movies for final presentation. During their preparation, students had to watch the films several times and they selected the sections they would like to introduce. After each group introduced their favorite movie, a final examination in the form of a listening test and a questionnaire were given to the students. The researcher's analysis of the questionnaire showed that over 80% of the students "felt" their listening comprehension did improve because they listened to the sentences several times. Moreover, the students learned to focus on English dialogues more while watching movies. In addition, 77% of the students thought the activity was either "good and helpful" or "very good and helpful" and "many students commented on the questionnaire that it was very interesting to learn English by watching movies". This study indicates the importance of

students' motivation while learning English.

3. Teacher's Role in Using Movies in Class

From the discussion above, it could be concluded that using movies as an instrument has benefits due to its offering audio-visual aids, authentic materials and motivation for active learning. However, no matter how beneficial a movie can be, it will not fully function as an effective instrument without teacher's proper guiding. Thus, the teacher's role in using movies in English class for junior college students is crucial.

3.1 The Importance of teacher's Role

In an English class of junior college students, a teacher's role is far more complicated than just an operator who controls the computer and multimedia equipment. It is teachers' job to help students understand the teaching purpose, requirement, process and importance of the class. Whether a class is effective or not depends on teachers' design, which means there are related and effective classroom activities to promote students' listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating abilities. Teachers are the leaders of a class who controls the processing pace, adjusts atmosphere and creates opportunities for students to practice. After the activities, it is very important that teachers give helpful and appropriate assessment. Students need help to adjust their learning process and results.

However, teacher's leading and guiding role is missing in real classes of junior college students in China nowadays. It is also the reason why many students think that watching movies in class is just for fun but without any help. It is the reason why there are not enough effective activities related to the movie and help improve English learning[12]. The efficiency of using movie as a teaching tool in English class relies on the roles teachers are playing.

3.2 Different Roles of Teacher in Class

Teacher's roles are very helpful to improve the effectiveness of a class which uses movies as a teaching tool. As a matter of fact, high requirements of these roles are goals for teachers to accomplish. As a matter of fact, we are quite aware that when a teacher plays movie in class, he/she only puts the DVD in the computer and sits backward in the classroom. Sometimes the darkness of the classroom and the super-boring movie makes students sleepy. We do have questions for some details of the movie, but the movie is going on and we quickly forget them. Sometimes we need teachers to pause and ask questions and explain them. So what are the roles that a teacher should play when using movies as an instrument in English class for junior college students? The followings are certain roles that a teacher should play.

Role A: Advocate who helps students understand the purpose, requirement, process and importance of using the movie in class

Role B: Designer who designs related and effective classroom activities to promote students' listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating abilities

Role C: Organizer who arranges class procedures, instructs processing and concludes results

Role D: Leader who controls the processing pace, adjusts atmosphere and creates opportunities for students to practice

Role E: Explainer who gives the related background information of the movie

Role F: Assessor who gives assessment for students to adjust their learning

Role G: Operator who is skilled at operating computer and multimedia equipment

Role H: Researcher who promotes himself or herself during the process of preparing and teaching class

4. Activities of Using Movies as an Instrument in Class

Without appropriate activities, using movies as an instrument in class can not yield the greatest returns on the investment of time and energy. Appropriate activities require teachers' careful

preparation before class, as well as students' cooperation in and after the class. Then, what activities are the most effective ones? The following parts will discuss this issue in five dimensions: listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating.

First, listening activities. In my opinion, there are three activities of listening that may be effective for English teachers of junior college students. The first one is to follow and imitate dialogues in the movie. The second one is to take notes for the key information. And the third one is to ask questions according to the note-taking of the sections of movies.

Second, speaking activities. There are three activities offered. The first one is to discuss about the movie. The second one is to recite some classic dialogues in the movie. The last one is to perform some of the scenes in the movie.

Third, reading activities. The reading activity is limited when we connect it with the movie. Teachers can ask the students to read the related information of the movie, including the background, actors and directors' introduction and movie comments, etc. The reading activity here is not as helpful as them in comprehensive and extensive reading classes. The text related to movies has limitations in language. Most of them are general introductions without personal opinions and profound thinking.

Forth, writing activities. The traditional writing activity is to write comment and discussion about the movie. This is very common for students and I believe it's very helpful because the after-class writing requires reconstruction of what students obtained from the movie and profound thinking which helps students to practice the ability of critical thinking.

Fifth, translating activities. The activity for practicing translating is new for students. Teachers can turn off the sound and ask students to translate the Chinese subtitles into English.

5. Conclusions

Nowadays, with the development of teaching technology and equipment, more and more teachers want to use movies as instruments in teaching a foreign language. However, in junior college student's English class, when our learners are lack of self-learning ability, the disadvantages of using movies often take dominance and the advantages are not fully realized. It needs teachers' guidance to help students to learn how to improve their English ability through movies and develop the ability of self-learning. Thus, teacher's role is of crucial importance when movies are used in class. This paper first review and analyze theories related to teaching language with movies in class. Then this paper analyzes the roles that teachers play in junior college students' English class. To make the lesson efficient, a teacher should be an advocate, designer, organizer, leader, explainer, assessor, operator and researcher. At last the author gives some suggestions of the activities related to using movies as an instrument in class. I hope this paper may help teachers with the preparation of a lesson and make their class more effective.

Acknowledgments

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