

An Investigation into the Effects of English Movies on English Listening and Suggestions

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Abstract

English movies gradually go into students' daily and learning life along with reforms and the popularity of multimedia in English-teaching. Based on the Second Language Acquisition theory of Krashen, this paper is trying to explore the positive impact of English movies on English listening.

Key words: English movies; Second Language Acquisition Theory; English Listening.

1. Introduction

Recent years, with the rapid development of China in the international arena, the demand for the talented person is in great needs. Cultivation of the talent therefore becomes a crucial and an important issue. According to the "College English Curriculum Requirements" issued by the Ministry of Education, which clearly pointed out that: "the goal of the college English teaching is to develop students' English proficiency, especially the ability of listening and speaking, so that they can use English in the future study, work and social interactions to communicate effectively. Also the goal is made to enhance students' self-learning ability, cultural awareness, to meet the needs of social development and international exchange of our country..." and "foreign language teaching theory is the guide of the university English. English language knowledge and practical skills, cross-cultural communication and learning strategies are regarded as main contents which merge a variety of teaching models and teaching methods as the integration of the education system.

However, after almost ten years of English learning, the majority of students are able to read English, do exercises and get high marks. But listening and speaking have become the weaknesses. Some students can't understand fundamental English communications or dialogues. Though some can make simple conversations with foreigners, because of the differences between English and Chinese thinking, they just can't speak well in a proper way so that a dialogue usually "ends at early age". At its most basic, there are some problems: poor English pronunciation and intonation; blind to the cultural difference and background knowledge; deficient in vocabularies, phrases and the lack of good sense of language.

2. Literature Review

English listening is an important part in English teaching, which is also the foundation in international and daily-life communications. At present, there exist many hearing problems among students. So, how to help the students to overcome the obstacles in English listening? This paper aims to investigate the positive influence of English movies on English listening. The introduction of English films, the effective combination of English sound and image can greatly improve the students' interest in learning English, which is also beneficial to break through the bottleneck in listening, so that students' English listening ability will be enormously.

We have a clear understanding of the vital importance of context for English learning, because it can greatly enhance the listening competence of the students. It has been reported before that people in a small town named Meade Na Pohl in the Northwest of Calcutta India found a girl called Camara, who had been raised by wolves in 1920. According to the study, the girl only knew the things that a 6-month baby knows when she was first discovered at her seven or eight age. As people have made great effort to teach her, but they can not made her quickly adapt to the human lifestyle. Until her death, she failed to truly speak. She just learned 6 words within 4 years and understood a few simple words. After 7 years, she just learned 45 words and could spoke a few words reluctantly. That is a well-known "Wolf-Child" story.

On the basis of mentioned problems in terms of English Listening, the paper chooses the scope of English learners, the ultimate goal of which is to find out the positive influence of English movies on English listening for English learners so as to have their listening ability cultivated and listening proficiency improved at the same time.

2. The Theoretical backgrounds

In this section, the theoretical backgrounds about the paper based on Krashen's input, filter hypothesis theory and Paivio's dual code theory, a study is designed for the purpose of examining the positive influence of the English movies on English listening.

2.1 Krashen's input hypothesis theory

With regard to the influence of English study in original English movie edition, one of the major theory is the one from the American linguist Krashen called input hypothesis theory, which elucidates that only when the learner obtains the approach to available language input as well as emphasize on the understanding to meaning or information rather than make sense of the format, can it be called language acquisition. For instance, in the formula of "i +1" where i stands for the current level of language learners' ability whereas 1 represents the language materials which are a little bit difficult than the learners' current level. According to the input hypothesis theory, one of the possible paths that make language become understandable input is decipher the language form that hasn't been secured by the learners under the help of context information in language study input, which will help learners have access to language acquisition.

2.2 Krashen's filter hypothesis theory

The Affective Filter Hypothesis Theory of Krashen is the second theory of English movies that has a positive influence on English Listening. Krashen believes that the learner's emotional state or attitude is an

adjustable filter. It can make the comprehensible input pass easily or it can block the comprehensible input that learning needed. The barrier even completely prevents acquisition. A large amount of comprehensible input environments do not mean that students can learn the target language very well in the process of second language acquisition. It is also influenced by many emotive factors. Affective filter makes it possible for comprehensible language input in learning. Krashen believes that the emotive factors which influence language acquisition are: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. That is to say, if the learner's motivation is strong and high self-confidence with the low sense of anxiety, the emotional barrier is lower, so the comprehensible input is higher; and vice versa.

2.3 Paivio's dual code theory

In addition, Paivio provides a theoretical basis called dual coding theory which is widely applied to English movies in language-teaching. On the basis of dual coding theory, it clarifies that the memory system of human being includes language and non-language system. When the system and the non-language systems are jointly decoding a language, it is easier to store information in one's memory than the language system or non-language system decodes language separately. Therefore, the human information processing mechanism system could dispose and process the auditory material and visual images. The image information, the voice information and the original knowledge system are integrated into a general system and transform the knowledge into long-term memory. While watching English movies, learner will combine the visual input and auditory input, which fully mobilize a variety of sensory organs of the learner to receive information. And it will effectively construct information and meaningful knowledge together, so as to promote the learners' listening ability and comprehensive ability.

3. The positive influence of English movies on English listening

English movies have positive effect on learners' listening study. English movies create a real language environment for learners with pictures, plots and performance which make the scene more vivid. The real language environment to make students deeply realizes the language environment. Also in the movie the lines and language are more colloquial, it is more practical learners. In the film, the language is simple and the sentence is not very long, so that they can be easily understood. By watching the film, students can not only form language sense, but also correct their wrong tone and intonation. The repeated presence of the learned or new words, phrases and sentences also leave a deep impression on learners. So movies can enhance students' learning interest, also to deepen students' cognition of western culture.

3.1 To correct learners' wrong tone and intonation

Firstly, English movies are conducive to correct learners' wrong tone and intonation. Phonetics, grammar and vocabulary are the fundamental primary elements of a language, as we all know. And tone and intonation are the primary foundation in learning English, which guarantee the normal oral conversations. Also right tone and intonation contribute to better conversations and exchanging ideas. A prestigious professor Wu of Peking Foreign university once said: "English is vocal." Only by pronouncing correctly, can others understand you what you say better and the speakers can acquire new information and knowledge

through comprehensive listening. So the tone and intonation have played an indispensable role in English learning.

And the English movies are the most standard materials which contains the accurate pronunciation. Sometimes learners will subconsciously simulate a phrase or one sentence they fancy through watching. A repeated word, a phrase and sentence will definitely stimulate learners' auditory system which helps to correct their acquired wrong tone and intonation. And in the mean time, they are able to acquire the right tone and intonation.

3.2 To promote learners' understanding of western culture

Secondly, English movies are conducive to promote understanding of culture. Language is the carrier of culture; culture is the foundation of the language. Language can not be separated from culture and exist alone. "University English curriculum requirements" also propose that educators should pay attention to the cultivation of students' intercultural communication competence and pay attention to the cultivation of students' sensitivity of cultural differences, tolerance and flexibility in dealing with cultural gap. For example, in our life, a large number of students tend to ask their foreign teachers or foreign friends: "How much is your current salary?" Absolutely, the foreign teacher or friends may feel uncomfortable or they will be a little unhappy. Because in foreign country, if asked such question, you may be regarded to be impolite, invading their privacy. But if you ask the same question in China, it is totally okay. Therefore, there is a big difference between Chinese and Western culture, these differences caused the different ways of thinking.

English movies can be a very good way to the dissemination of culture, from the plot to the relationship between the characters and the narrative different greatly from Chinese thinking. But these were expressed by means of language and cultural differences, not through the analysis of linguistic. So we need to understand the American culture, especially some of the characteristics of western culture. Learners can analyze the plots on the basis of understanding culture. One can understand culture better on the basis of the analysis of plots and through reflection. They will also get to know the Western values, the difference between Chinese and Western culture and the way of thinking through the comprehensive understanding of Western history and so on which will enhance the language to a real communicative and high level, making English "live".

3.3 To help learners to memory words and phrases

Finally, the English original sound movies can promote students' ability of remembering words and phrases effectively. If you simply ask students to learn vocabularies, students who are facing a great number of vocabularies and thick vocabulary books, first of all, may exit psychological fear easily. Then, in the process of memory, students may also doubt their methods of studying because the efforts they took cannot be paid back as they have expected. Thus they will feel gradually frustrated and give up memorizing words. Basic English movies, to some extent, can foster students' sense of language by correcting their mistakes on pronunciation and intonation. Also, the rich pictures, the expressions, gestures of the characters in the movies, background music and attractive plots, can arouse students' interest about studying English and break through many obstacles on learning it. It can contribute to improving the ability of English.

English movie provides students for certain real conditions and environments of listening material as well as the specific and visualized image of the text vivid atmosphere, which to a large extent can promote the student to yield memory of frequent words and phrases that don't be acquired. According to the theory of Dual Code, the combining of language and non-language systems are better than single or nonverbal language system in promoting and deepening the memory of people. Therefore the combination of watching and listening yield effective and efficient memory than mere listening.

4. Suggestions

After knowing the positive influence of English movies on English listening, we now get to know that English movies are conducive to our English listening. Still there are some detailed suggestions given of how exactly we can do to improve our competence of English listening.

4.1 The selection of English movies

English movies have various kinds and are rich in contents, so not every English film is favorable to English learners. Only if the learners choose those suitable for themselves according to their distinct psychological characteristics, can they foster the cross-cultural communicative ability and benefit from the film. As for the thought of movies, learners should choose movies with vivid scene, healthy content and positive thinking, such as "A Beautiful Mind", "Wizard of Oz". As for the degree of difficulty of the language material, learners should choose the language with moderate difficulty and rich in contents with accurate accent and good image quality. As for the theme, learners should choose films which are able to embody the local conditions and customs of English speaking countries, such as living habits, thinking patterns and communicative style, like movies "The Pursuit of Happiness", "Forrest Gump" and so on.

4.2 The import of English movies

4.2.1 To understand the cultural backgrounds

English films contain a great amount of unique Western culture. And there is a big difference between Western values, ways of thinking and Eastern values, ways of thinking. In the meantime, the local customs are extremely indigestible to numerous students. If learners know little about Western history and culture, it will definitely be difficult for them to understand the listening materials while they are watching English movies. Learners do not necessarily be very interested in of western culture in their daily or study life, or because some knowledge is so abstract that it causes them perplexed. English movies cover many of the local customs of Western countries. Before watching the film or in the process, learners could ask counselors about relevant cultural background or search the knowledge on the computer. Owing to their love towards films, learners are bound to pay attention to this knowledge, and because of watching English movies, it makes the related knowledge become easier for learners to understand and accept.

4.2.2 The playing mode of English movies

Learners could adopt the learning methods of step by step when they are going to practice their listening through watching a movie. There are a large number of slang, dialects in English movies, and the actors or actresses speak very fast with stress, reductions, which resulting in that some learners can not keep up with the pace of the movie. Learners should pause at the more difficult part, to learn the key sentences

until they fully are understandable of its meaning. Some movies last for a long time which contain lots of information and it is a barrier for learners to clear. As for this matter, learners may divide the movie into several fragments, using a few pieces of time segment to watch. This is sectioning method whose best advantage is to avoid students feeling a sense of fatigue. While the weakness of it is that it puts too much emphasis on the understanding of individual sentences which obviously ignoring the theme of movies. So after a period of training and the ability to grasp the details has been improved, learners are able to use the integrated approach, which means watching a movie in one time when they have the competence to accept a large amount of language input, in order to make the students grasp overall theme from a movie.

4.2.3 The selection of English subtitles

If learners intend to take full advantages of English movies to improve their listening ability, the selection of subtitle is an indispensable part for them. As we all know that a coin has two sides. And it is same with the subtitled films and movies without subtitles which mean both of the two kinds have merits and weaknesses. Movies with subtitles are beneficial to learners in promoting the acquisition of second language, because learners are able to understand the very fast speed of language speaking in the movie with the help of subtitles. They can learn colloquial, authentic spoken English and they can follow the development of the plot smoothly. At the same time, the learning environment is less stressful so that they are both physically and mentally relaxed which will contribute to their studying. While the drawback of it is that, with the help of caption, English movies tend to more like a reading comprehension and just to increase vocabularies rather than listening training. Also students will be more reliable on subtitles and reluctant to use their brain to speculate and conjecture dialogues in the movie. They may be unwilling to take the initiative to understand the film by themselves, which is excessively unfavorable to their listening.

Research shows that subtitled films have more advantages than films without subtitles in enhancing the learning motivation, in changing the learning attitude, in improving the development of vocabularies and the fluency of oral English. And films with subtitles are conducive to improving the overall listening ability and promote students' understanding, while films without subtitles contain some disadvantageous factors. First, learners can not tell some fuzzy accents and they can not fully understand some of the western culture and customs. Second, if learners encounter some professional words or slang, they will do not understand what the speaker says, which totally turn an admirable and relaxing thing into a kind of torturing activity with relatively high pressure. But movies without subtitles play an important role in improving learners' guessing competence from the context through the facial expressions, gestures, tone of the speakers and thus it will rapidly increase learners' listening ability.

In general, learners tend to have a psychological dependence towards films with subtitles which enables them not to concentrate on listening to the dialogue. Learners have obstacles of fully understanding what the film wants to express without subtitles. How to solve this problem? Learners should obey the principle of gradual progress. That is to say, if they are not fully understandable of the content of the films without subtitles. Then it is advisable to use subtitled films or even bilingual subtitles in both Chinese and English, according to learners' present English level. But they can not always rely on the help of subtitles. If in this way, their English level is impossible to improve to the higher level. Film subtitle is a just a kind of means and process, the ultimate purpose is to successfully understand English movies without subtitles.

4.3 The export of English movies

Watching a movie for learners is just a process of passive learning. Only combining the learning and practice together, learners will achieve better results. This requires that learners integrate the learning of English movies and listening, speaking, reading and writing exercises together: the learners could intercept exceptional dialogues and turn off the movie screen. The film simply becomes a piece of listening material that students could repeatedly listen to. It will definitely train and improve students' listening ability.

Secondly, learners should do intensive role play repeatedly. That is to say, while they are watching an English movie, it is necessary for them to look back again with the problem they do not understand at first. After learners are well familiar with the plot, then they can try to listen to it for several times and maybe try to play the characters. Shortly after learners are familiar with the contents, they may learn to improve their tone, intonation and language fluency, and then perform the English movies with all heart. It is a gradual and lengthy process. Learners can also recite the part of movies he loves, whenever and wherever possible to practice. Of course, the most important is that they must adhere to it and persist. After that if there are still some they don't understand, it is okay to look at and analyze the film script, to see the expressions you don't know. Through doing such intensive role play exercises, we will be able to acquire a large number of idioms and authentic expressions. Accumulation like this will definitely promote the level of learners' listening ability.

5. Conclusion

English movies are very vivid and intuitive, and the culture connotation is quite rich. It can be an effective way to correct our pronunciation and intonation, learn western culture, improve the ability of cross-cultural communication, and cultivate the sense of language and so on. The idiomatic English expression, real language environment, rich cultural connotation can not only be watched as an entertainment, but also we can know more about the cultural connotation. Language is the carrier of culture and learning a language is to understand the cultural process. So for English learners, the original English movies have a positive impact on English Listening.

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