



## Using Films in the Multimedia English Class

Youming Wang

Department of English languages

Capital Institute of Physical Education

Beijing 100192, China

E-mail: wangyouming9992@sina.com.cn

### Abstract

With the great, constant renovation and development of various knowledge and economy, talents of compound, high quality and high skills are in urgent need in society; a new educational reform runs through the whole foreign teaching courses, including audio-visual course, speaking, reading, writing and translating courses. With the aid of computers, films (DVD, Mp3 etc.) play an important role in foreign language labs in China. More and more students are interested in not only for oral but also for the process of acquiring languages. Now students are becoming stronger and stronger in their curiosity for knowledge and comprehension for acquiring languages. Therefore, the foreign teachers are confronted with the great challenges: 1) How to make audio-visual classes become effective learning process instead of pure entertainment in class; 2) How to make students become active participants in class. 3) How to practice rehearse the kinds of listening and speaking in the classroom? 4) How to help students build confidence in dealing with the language? 5) How to design classroom procedures on students' listening and speaking abilities? So, the purpose of this paper is to introduce some useful and practical methods to build students' confidence in learning English; and also to exploit the design of films' class through multimedia.

**Keywords:** Films, Language acquiring, English teaching

### 1. Review of Literature & Introduction

To date, people have created many teaching methods for teaching non-native speakers English as second language. With the rapid improvement on learners' communicative abilities, researchers presently are not satisfied with these devices and begin to study new ways. In 1895, film was invented by Edison. Immediately, film was widely used in many different fields, such as science, literature and foreign teaching. In the western countries, a lot of linguists have paid more attention to this audio-visual method and studied it, which connects sound with pictures. This teaching method is very helpful and useful for beginners to understand language skills and to remember contexts or new and complex patterns and words. Many foreign teachers using the audio-lingual method have wished for some improvement or modification of the accepted methodology. Although teachers find the memorization and pattern practice exercises useful for the early stages, they feel a need to build a bridge from those highly structured activities to the freer, more creative use of the language at the intermediate and advanced levels. So Newton (1974, 31) pointed out: "a potential drawback of the audio-lingual method was its tendency to be dull and uninspiring (for both students and teachers), but the audio-visual method could make the drills more interesting by varying their forms, by providing a meaningful context, and by using visual aids. Resourceful teachers often succeeded in teaching process by such means." The use of film in teaching belongs to the audio-visual approach, which is an interesting and effective in college English. The change should be a great lash to the traditional grammar-oriented and book-centered teaching methods. According to Westrand (1965, 111): "the sound film is a more effective medium than tape for modeling a foreign language and the accompanying behavior patterns. The audio-visual methods will become more usable in language labs. Meanwhile, the showing of a film can usually be followed by audio exercises which use the sound track of the film and which prompt the recall of the visual component." In China, because of the influence of western educational methods, a lot of linguists have begun to study audio-visual methods. The teacher is becoming an audience or organizer, while the students are actor or actress on the stage. Wang Li, a famous linguist, believes that "the audio-visual method can train students sense of eye-sight, the sense of hearing, and the sense of movement (1979, 22)". Films, with their colors, movement and varying shapes, present new images to the mind and act as a great stimulus to the imagination, as film can show various parts of the world and the changes and development of form.

### 2. Discussions: Advantages and disadvantages of film strips in English Teaching

Compared with the traditional teaching-centered, book-centered, grammar-translation method, films on videos (or VCD, DVD, etc.) and computers are gradually regarded as a challenge for the routine language teaching, especially for the dominant intensive reading in classroom. The audio-visual approach certainly produces some active effects. First, with

audio-visual environments clues, the students can never wait to be “fed” by teachers, they will try their best to move into the target languages, and to search for various different cultures, information such as how the native speakers behave and interact with each other ; their values on all things, customs, housing, clothing and even food. Owing to the rich contextual setting available, students can adopt spontaneous way of learning, learn to think and to widen their scope of knowledge outside of the textbooks which form the process of large new information receiving and intensified patterns. Second, on the part of teachers, in order to arouse students’ interests and self-confidence in language learning, they can organize students to express new ideas, to generate their own creative languages in different contexts, to discuss and negotiate with each other through watching films, and making up text film and classroom film by themselves. Third, the interesting films produce more vivid and direct perceived through the senses, which strength students’ a long memory and improve their comprehension. However, on the other hand, it is obvious that the audio-visual method has its own drawbacks. First of all, some films will normally last one hour, even two hours, that is to say, the audio-visual class will become a simple entertainment class, just watching films pleasurably rather than language learning process, so that the students lose their clear, exact directions. Maybe they will be led to failure in practice. Second, many equipments in the language labs don’t work in the period of class frequently. Third, not all film strips on various topics with languages fit for students’ level. Fourth, not all film strips can provide appropriate and accurate pictures of the target culture and language, which may easily lead to learners’ misunderstanding of the cultures.

### 3. 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.

### 4. 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 figure 1:

Insert Figure 1 Here

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:

*4.1 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 stun, 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.

#### 4.2 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.

#### 4.3 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)

#### 4.4 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.

#### 4.5 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.

Insert Figure 2 Here

**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. E.G.

G: (Brightly) We're going to Florida.

V: (Quietly) It is.

G: Want some wine?

V: (Smiling and taking a swig from the bottle) Thanks.

G: Are you married?

V: I don't know.

G: (Surprised) You don't know?

.....

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.

### 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

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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Figure 1.

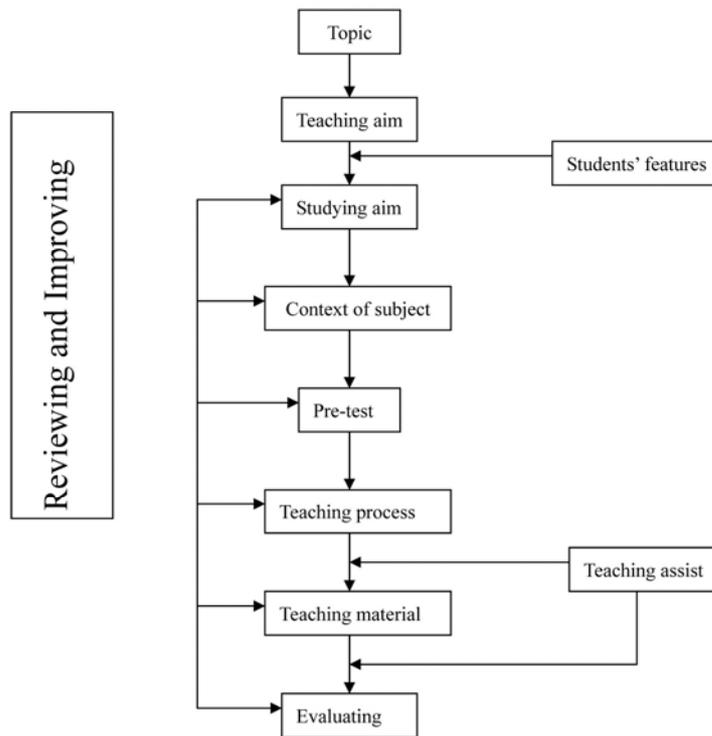


Figure 2.

Title: It's up to you.

Level: Moderate and below

Time: 40-50minutes

Aims: To show how speakers adapt what they say and their delivery (speed, vocabulary etc.) to their listeners; to listen carefully and imitate the monologues and make a transcript.

Materials: Film

Preparation: Cultural notes, Vocabulary and Difficult sentences five minutes of the film in printed English materials.

Process: 1. Play the film and ask the students to get a general idea of it.

2. Play the film again and ask the students whether they get the impression of the characters in the film. Ask the students the following questions about the film: why does Robbie feel excited and fearful? What adjectives can be used to describe Robbie and Phillip?

3. Ask the students to see the film again. This time, they should write down word for word what they heard. Give them a few minutes to compare their transcription with another partner to see if they wrote the same thing, and discuss any problems they had.

4. In pairs, they can make up a dialogue according to what they wrote, and then perform in class.