Film Analysis through Linguistic base

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Abstract

Studies made in the last few years show that using films in language classrooms is an effective way in teaching a foreign language. Well-chosen films can serve as a valuable pedagogical aid, both for classroom use and self-study. This article is about using films in language classrooms through a specially designed course, whose outline description is given, in the English Language Teaching Department at Kocaeli University. This article indicates that this course helps students to get a more realistic panorama of the cultural aspects of the language, to improve their language skills, to think critically and to develop their own ways of using films in language education.

Introduction

In the era of technology it is obvious that traditional methods in language learning and language teaching can be replaced with more contemporary methods and techniques. The courses based on chalk and board and course books which make students passive and dependent upon their teachers do not motivate students to learn language and also do not motivate teachers to teach language. Since students are bombarded with mass media, curriculum developers and teachers have to make use of it in their curriculum since it provides both audio and visual features. In this context, the use of films can provide a good path to create different atmosphere in the classroom where students both learn and enjoy learning.

With the spread of audio-visual resources in educational institutions, the use of films is becoming more and more common in foreign language teaching. Films are a form of communication and they enable the learner to see body rhythm and speech rhythm in second

language discourses through observing the use of authentic language and intonation in various situations (Bello, 1999). Because they combine visual and audio stimuli, films can lower anxiety when practising the skill of listening (Arthur, 1999).

For language learners, films have the added benefit of providing authentic language and cultural information (Bello, 1999; Stempleski, 1992). Additionally, Stempleski (1992) states that using authentic videos in the classroom can provide opportunities for learners to evaluate the very medium that they use in their daily life. Films also present slices of life, and as such, they add fun and involvement to the language classroom (Massi & Merino, 1996).

As well as language learners, language teachers need films as they can present culture effectively, motivate students and themselves, have access to a rich body of linguistic material, update their image of the target country and culture, provide interactive laboratory activities, and move naturally from listening to speaking and writing (Altman, 1999).

By looking at a film students and viewers engage with it intellectually and creatively. They learn how to think through a variety of perspectives rather than merely one (Boggs, 1996; Phillips 1999). In other words, by considering different dimensions of an issue, the viewers or the students can infer more meanings, and they can participate actively.

The aim of this paper is to indicate that use of films in ELT classrooms can be very helpful in achieving these targets especially if they are studied on a systematic basis which takes into consideration four different aspects of film studies: Literary, Dramatic, Cultural and Language.

The Study

A 14-week undergraduate course, "Film Analysis through Linguistic Base", is designed in the English Language Teaching Department at Kocaeli University for implementation for a period of three years. The aims of the course are:

1. To create a new context for students to practice their English
2. To teach the language and the culture of that language simultaneously
3. To develop their critical thinking abilities and their creativity through films

The method used to reach the aims of the course is solely based on the analysis of the films from different aspects. Each film is based on different thematic content to reinforce and consolidate topics treated within the language syllabus, such as education, ecology, the changing role of women in society etc.; different terminology and different grammatical and functional aspects of the language.

The course includes four stages. The first stage, which lasts two weeks, involve the explanation of some basic terms related to film analysis by showing sample scenes chosen from different films. The aim of that stage is to inform students how films are constructed and about the aims and the procedure of the course since the course is different from the traditional ones.

The second stage of the course, which lasts four weeks, focuses on the analysis of various four films from different genres. The aim of this stage is to help students how to analyze films in different perspectives and to show how each item in the films contribute to our

understandings. All students watch the movie together in a separate room that is specially designed for watching films or theatrical performances at a specified time other than their course hours.

A framework has been adapted from Teasley & Wilder (1997) (See in the Appendices) as it provides a rich source for examining different aspects of a film. "Cinematic Aspects" in the framework is left out since it requires expert knowledge for analysis of films (e.g. camera movement, camera angles etc.). A "Language Aspects" component has been put in to the framework to enhance students' knowledge of vocabulary and to enable them to improve their skills in listening, speaking, writing and reading. And the "Cultural Aspects" component is there to make them understand cultural features of the target language. The framework has been organized as following:

Framework for Analyzing Films

Literary Aspects	Dramatic Aspects	Cultural Aspects	Language Aspects
Who are the characters in the film?	Did the actors make you forget they were acting? How?	Cultural quotations and conversations	Language of the film (how the forms of communication are used in the film)
What is the film's setting?	Were costumes, make-up, and set equally important to the success of the film?	The socio-historical background to the film	Memorable quotes in the film; metaphors, symbols, ellipsis, contrast etc.
What are the main plot elements?	In what scene was an actor's voice (pitch, volume, expression) particularly effective?	Economic and political factors that conditioned its making	Use of sound and music

What is the theme of the film?	Select a scene that must have been difficult to act. How did the actor make his or her body movements and facial expression appropriate and convincing?	The ideology, the trends and characteristics of the society at the time of the production	Use of body language and mimics
What is the mood of the film?	Did the actors establish their characters more through dialogue or through movement and facial expressions?		Use of the setting in communication
What symbols did you notice?			

The discussions and analyses in the second stage follow the order provided in the framework mentioned above, i.e., in the first week, the study focuses on literary aspects, and in the second week, on dramatic aspects of the film, and so forth. During the four weeks' time, they are also required to collect pieces of information about the four films they watch, directors, cast, music etc. They share their opinions and the information they collected and talk about them in the classroom following the week they watch each film. These two phases of the course can be thought as the theoretical basis of the course.

The third stage of the course, which lasts four weeks, depends heavily on students' work: they prepare and carry out film workshops in groups, applying the knowledge and skills they gain in the first and second stage. The aim of this stage is to make the students perform what they have learnt in the second stage and to exchange their ideas with the others. During the four-week period they watch some other four films, all based on different themes, with different genres. The class is divided into four groups. Each group watches and works on the film in separate rooms and the guidance is provided by the instructor. Each group examines the films from different aspects of the same movie and present what they have prepared about the films. In other words, while a group is responsible for the literary aspect, another group is

responsible for the dramatic aspects of the same film, and so forth. It helps all the students in the classroom to perceive the same film from different perspectives.

By analyzing the features of language aspects they get realistic ideas about verbal and non-verbal language; by analyzing dramatic aspects they realize the importance of body language by observing the performances of actors and actresses on a specific condition, by analyzing different literary features of the films they improve their critical thinking skills, by analyzing cultural aspects they get a more realistic idea about the culture of the language. For cultural aspects films adapted from literature are preferred since those films provide a more realistic and authentic understandings of language and culture as Gareis (2000) concluded in a case study carried out in an intensive English program.

The fourth and the last stage of the course lasts two weeks. The aim of this stage is to make students create their own activities; develop their language competence and professional abilities using films on behalf of education. Each group is told to create different activities, games and tasks based on each aspect mentioned in the framework above. They are also supposed to create original activities and tasks that they can use in their teaching career by taking one scene, one frame, one quote or the film itself and adapt it to language skills: grammar, reading, vocabulary and so on. This work is especially important since all of the students are prospective teachers of English and they can use those works when they become teachers. By creating different activities using films, they can create different atmosphere for their students in the future. In this stage, they perform all the activities and tasks they have created. For each aspect one example is given in the Appendices.

All the activities created by the students are listed according to the category they belong to such as skill-based activities or aspect based activities and distributed to the students in CDs. These activities show how films can be helpful for students to display their creativity. They can realize that being a teacher does not mean practising or trying what the others say but finding new ideas on your own. It improves their self-confidence and motivation to be a language teacher.

As for evaluation of the students' success, three different methods are used. During the second and third phase which last 8 weeks students individually write 8 reports about the related tasks of the week and keep them in their portfolios. After each report is read students are given a written and oral feedback so that they can see the cons and pros of their study. Correction on these reports means also an improvement in students' written ability, with effective use of terminology and creative expression. During fourth phase, students are evaluated according to the activities they create by their class mates and the researcher. As for the final, students watch a film at the end of the term and one hour after this screening they are asked to write a review of the film to evaluate what each student has learnt through the course.

Evaluation of the course

In order to evaluate the course, students are asked their thoughts and comments on the course in a written mode. The most common responses raised by 240 students during three years make me draw the conclusions below:

1. Language Skills: The course helps them to improve their speaking and listening skills.

They start to perceive the differences of accents in terms of different social classes and ethnic roots and they have learnt very different idioms and phrases by this way. During their presentations it is easily observed that they can speak more fluently and accurately using different vocabulary items. Especially for understanding what they hear films are more beneficial for students than audio materials. The results of this study are similar to the research prepared by Herron, Hanley and Cole (1995). Their results of using twelve different videos with foreign language learners indicates that extensive listening is facilitated by the richness of the context that visual organizers, such as films, provide. Also, since they read a lot of books or documentaries in English in order to prepare their presentations they improve their reading skills and learn some new vocabulary. When they write reports about film analysis their writing skills are also improved. Apart from these, they understand the importance of body language and the significance of tone and intonation during speech in emphasizing the meaning effectively.

2. Culture of the Narrative: Some prejudices have turned out to be groundless since they learn about the social, historical and religious background of the culture the language of which they are learning. Since they think it is almost impossible to learn and teach a foreign language without being aware of the culture, they think this course is very effective to show the historical background, social life and religion of the society of the countries where English is spoken.

3. Developing Motivation: They feel much more comfortable during the presentations and their thinking and interpretation skills are improved. As they have experienced how they can get inspiration from one scene and find out new and original activities

their awareness of their own potentials and their belief in becoming qualified teachers have increased. They also believe that they have gained intellectual and artistic maturity in the interpretation of the performance arts. As the content of the course is different from the other classical courses, they find it interesting and enjoyable. They have found out that there is no limit to the ways of teaching a foreign language and every material can be used as a means of teaching. Since most of the courses, they think, are strictly dependent upon course books or traditional methods and they do not reflect real life they think this course brings the real life to the classroom atmosphere with more flexible understandings and methods. After this course they start to perceive films as a tool used on behalf of language teaching.

4. Critical Thinking Skills: While examining the symbols and metaphors in films they have found some parallel in real life and formed new opinions about human behaviours and start to look at life from different perspectives. The scene selections, sound effects and sound tracks in films have helped to improve their aesthetic skills. They state they automatically find themselves analysing the acting, the scenes and the characters while watching a film. They think not only films but also other audio-visual material such as advertisements; cartoons and so on should be studied in ELT curriculum since they think it can give better understandings about life.

Most of the students also give some ideas although they are not one of the aims of the course such as:

1. The researches they make for films have improved their searching skills. Their computer skills also improved indirectly as they deal with film cutting and editing programs.

2. They think, in our country, it is sometimes expensive to find films with English subtitles and it is difficult to find some old but good films. For that reason they think it is a great chance to reach those films in their school without paying any money.

All of the students think that this course should take place in ELT curriculum. Drawbacks they mention are not related to the course itself but to some problems with reaching computer or some problems with their group mates.

Summary and Discussion

People have different purposes to watch a film; some people watch them to be informed, some have aesthetic reasons, some watch them just for fun. Whatever the reason, films provide a rich context for people to talk together and exchange ideas since it is easy to access them. Therefore, this course has been very helpful as the students display that they have not only enjoyed and learned some language and culture related topics but also gained to express themselves in a more authentic aura of language acquisition.

Some researchers claim that using films for educational purposes is more beneficial than the videos specially made for educational purposes. A large-scale survey by Canning-Wilson (2000) suggests that the students like learning language through the use of videos. One of the results of her survey shows that learners prefer action/entertainment films to language films or documentaries in the classroom. There are even some institutions such as

http://teachwithmovies.org/index.html which are especially interested in that idea and give clues to teachers how to use films for language skills or develop student motivation and sometimes they give the name of the films which can be used for educational purposes such as "Top Ten Inspirational Movies for Educators" in http://712educators.about.com.

It is certain that films can be a valuable tool for promoting critical thinking skills, enhancing students' speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills, and help students to think along various dimensions, open doors to different lives and understandings. The most important issue here is not whether we use films in our classrooms or not, but how we use them in our classrooms.

Using a film in education does not mean just sitting, watching, pausing and being asked questions by the teacher what is going to happen next until they get bored. That's why this course planned for English Language Teaching department is based on how to use films in lessons and how to get benefit from films, especially for students who will be teachers in the near future. Rather than following the steps and instructions and practice the activities some others define, this course makes them find their own path to find different usages of the films for different purposes. After the course, students realize to adapt films into language teaching and also they improve their intellectual, professional and language abilities, realize their power, trust themselves, feel highly motivated as they state in their questionnaire and also as they can be observed. Therefore, integrating the seventh art and the ELT courses should be taken as an essentially productive and encouraging mode for the development of language abilities of the students.

The course, thus, is indicative of the fact that the students' presentation skills are improved,

and it points to the fact that some otherwise silent students become more active, creative and motivated especially when it is compared to conventional language courses. Most of the students graduated from the department declare that they have already started to use some of the principles of the course in their lessons and some of them have adapted the course partly/totally in their classrooms.

If some principles should be considered such as selection of the films according to the purpose of the course or the expertise of the instructor on that principle, such courses based on media studies will bring new atmosphere to the ELT classrooms.

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Appendices:

(1) Framework prepared by Teasley, A. B. and A. Wilder (1997).

Literary Aspects	Dramatic Aspects	Cinematic Aspects
Narrative	Acting	Music
Characters	Costumes	Sound and Vision
Setting	Make- up	Camera Angles
Theme		Camera Movement
Mood		Lighting
Symbols		

(2) Sample Activities Prepared by Students

Activity 1: "Symbol Catchers" Literary Aspect

Name of the film: Rear Window

Students in the first group write the symbols used in the film on pieces of paper and put them into a box, other students in the classroom randomly pick the name of the symbols out of the

box ("binoculars" means the male protagonist wants to see everything clearly; "display of the ring" means the female protagonist wants to marry him etc.) and talk about how these objects relate to the characters and story of the film. This activity increases students' awareness of the importance of symbols in films and in real life.

Activity 2: "Change the Dialogue" Dramatic Aspect

Name of the film: My Fair Lady

Students in a group deliver a dialogue in the film to the audience and give them some time to read it. After then, group members dramatize the same dialogue in two different ways; the former is with tone of voice, facial expression and body language suitable for the story in the dialogue; the latter is practising the dialogue just in words without facial expression or body language. Students in the classroom discuss the differences between these two adaptations. This activity increases students' understandings about the importance of non-verbal communication in conveying a message.

Activity 3: "Find the Differences" Cultural Aspect

The name of the film: How Green was my Valley.

Students in a group show different pictures from the film in two different ways; the former is about the life when the valley is green and the main protagonist is a child and the latter is about the life when the valley is grey and he is an old man. Students discuss the differences in terms of family relations, friendship, love and marriage, ecology etc. and compare the life in the past with the life in these days. This activity increases students' awareness about the effects of social changes on people's lives and society.

Activity 4: "That can't be his Words". Language Aspect

The Name of the film: One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest

Students in a group prepare some memorable quotes in the film and show those words in over head projector. The other students try to guess who could have said it in the film and how it affects our understandings about the character. This activity increases students' awareness about how words define characters and characters define words.

Activity 5: ELT activity: "Create your own Perfect Human"

Grammar, Speaking and Vocabulary skills

The Name of the Film: Truman Show

In the film Truman cuts different parts of a face from magazines and tries to make the face of his beloved by sticking the face parts together. The students are asked to bring parts of a face which can be found in magazines. Class is divided into groups. Each student tries to create his/her own perfect human sticking the parts on a sheet. Then he/she describes the face orally. This activity is especially appropriate for students who like creating materials on their own. It also improves their speaking skills with vocabulary related to human body.