



Language Acquisition with the Help of Captions

WANG Kunyun^{1,*}; LIU Huayu²

¹School of Foreign Languages, Qingdao University of Science and Technology, Qingdao, 266041, China

²Department of Foreign Training, Naval Aeronautical Engineering Institute, Yantai, 264001, China

Email: stellayantai@sohu.com

*Corresponding author.

Email: wkyun@sina.com

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Abstract

English movies with captions have special advantages to compensate for students' lack of experience abroad. With the help of captions, students could improve their English study interests and efficiency, improve their pronunciation, grasp more vocabularies, improve their cross-culture communicative competence and then increase their vocabulary application ability. Teachers should design all kinds of activities to achieve the goal of increase students' vocabulary acquisition.

Key words: English movies; Captions; Vocabulary Acquisition

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, English has been gradually emphasized to become a tool for teachers to teach their students for communication. Nowadays, technology has specifically played a crucial role in facilitating authentic communication. Multimedia technology (such as TVs, computers, networks, e-mails, VCRs, CD-ROMs, and interactive multimedia) aids in language teaching to integrate authentic, real-life situations into the language

classroom. In this particularly almost real language learning context, learners gradually acquire their language by being exposed to a genuine target language environment. In the second language acquisition theories, Krash has influenced most of the studies. He proposes that learners can grasp a large amount of language unconsciously through ample input. He suggests that the use of a target language in real communicative environments facilitate the learners' language acquisition. In other words, students are exposed to abundant comprehensible input in their classroom and their language acquisition takes place when comprehensible input is sufficiently delivered. Multimedia technology and verbal information and full visual context, such as captions have beneficial effects on language learning due to rich and authentic comprehensible input.

Captioned movies demonstrating pictures and words in auditory and visual form are more likely to activate both coding system upon processing the words and pictures. The results of the previous researches seem to sustain the view that the use of captions triggers multi-sensory processing, that is, interaction with audio, video, and print components all at the same time. Many teachers believe that captions shed new light on a better way of using various multimedia in an ESL classroom (Chung, 1999; Goldman, 1996).

English movies with captions have their unique advantages, for its very live situation created by the characters will improve our Chinese college students' vocabulary output. In the college English study, with the interaction of captions and vocabulary study, we need to make full use of teacher's leading role and student's principal role. Using the target vocabulary to construct the movie pool, we can organize multi-dimensional activities among the students to promote their comprehensive application abilities of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. The linguist River thought, to grasp enough vocabularies is the key to success to apply

English. Moreover, the vocabulary ability directly affects listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. But our country's students' vocabulary output ability is weaker than their acceptance ability, lower vocabulary application ability, misspelling, misuse of part of speech, wrong collocation. What students fluently use are still the words learned in the elementary period, without much depth. Till now, there are some articles studying vocabulary teaching from the perspective of English movies, involving incidental vocabulary acquisition, without deep multi-dimensional interactive analysis. This article, based on the unique advantage of the English movies in the teaching, in connection with context and interaction theory, tries to discuss college vocabulary acquisition.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 The Advantages of English Movies in English Teaching

1.1.1 Improve Student's English Speaking and Listening Ability and Enlarge Their Vocabulary

English movies provide a very good learning environment for English learners. Images, captions and sound stimulate the brain through the multimedia devices simultaneously, helping learners keep firmer and long lasting aural and vision trace in mind. Like watching the *Legally Blonde* and *Pride and Prejudice*, by paying attention to the heroines' pronunciation, learners could feel the differences between the American pronunciation and English pronunciation. Listening and speaking are two important ways to learn a language. They are also the most natural and efficient ways. By repeatedly listening and speaking, students can accumulate vocabulary, grasp the commonly used oral English sentence patterns, and incredibly increase the students' language sense, including different stress, rhythm, pitch, pause, speed which carries enormous amount of information.

English movies have very special advantages, especially in the listening and speaking training. First, English movies can provide the learners for a very real and vivid context. They can present a very natural language of normal speed, and various dialects. Second, English movies, in combination with audio and visual stimulation, verbal and nonverbal communication, will surely benefit the learner's language cognition and acquisition. Third, English movies can provide the learners with more repetitive chances. Finally, learners can achieve the acquisition of ESL, and the meanwhile, the acquisition of the ESL culture.

1.1.2 Improve Students' Cross-Culture Communicative Competence

To correctly understand and use a language, one must learn both the language and culture in the process of language learning. Cultural differences will be largely reflected in a film. Movies can always reflect western

people's ways of thinking and behavior. Those movies can help students have a better understanding of western cultures, their daily life, way of thinking and much practical English knowledge. "Only when one understands the culture and experiences the culture with the characters can he think like the westerners and command the cross-culture knowledge." Cultural knowledge will lay a good foundation for communication with foreigners in the future. Cultural knowledge will improve one's communicative competence.

1.1.3 Enliven the Atmosphere of the Classroom and Improve Students' Learning Efficiency

Interest is the best teacher, so the warm-up, lead-in, discussion, and extension of teaching can use the English movies to stimulate students' interests and create an interesting environment. Once they take lively interest in English learning, students will have a strong thirst for knowledge, and thus become very active in study. As a visual art, the films build very concrete and vivid visual images, so the audience could enjoy a series of moving pictures to enjoy the aesthetic perception, through the contagious characters' actions to reflect all aspects of life, and through the personalized original sound track to reveal the characters' psychological activity and display the characters' personalities. Especially, there are many movies about love, so students understand young people and old people's view towards love in different backgrounds and situations. That is what they are interested in. When seeing resonant plot or hear some beautiful lines of dialogue, students would want to express their feelings and thoughts to each other through imitation, discussion, and thus the classroom atmosphere become alive. What's more, they could acquaint themselves with British and American cultures enlarge their knowledge and broaden their mind. For example, the Ten Commandments

Tim Rees (1993) carried out a study at the International Language Institute of Massachusetts. He used CCTV news program and situation comedies for Chinese and Japanese students of ESL. Rees transcribes the captions on a word processor and uses the printed-out script of programs that students have viewed in class for classroom and homework reading. He also designs cloze and other vocabulary activities from TV programs students view together in classroom. The result of the study indicated that Chinese and Japanese students of ESL, viewing CCTV news program and situation comedies, increase their vocabulary, improve their listening comprehension, and accumulate their American culture.

Furthermore, Chung (1999) using a sample of 170 17-19 students of English, investigated whether videos used in different ways led to better listening comprehension. Chung divided the group into four proficiency levels and conditions: (1) they were provided with advanced organizers (pre-listening activities); (2) they were provided with captions in L2; (3) they were provided with

a combination of advanced organizers and captions; (4) they were provided with neither. An advanced organizer, a concept developed and systematically studied by David Ausubel in 1960, is information that is presented prior to learning and that can be used by the learners to organize and interpret new incoming information. The results showed that the combined condition scored significantly higher than the other three conditions. Chung concluded that the use of a combination of techniques of advanced organizers and captions can be more effective in enhancing the listener's listening comprehension.

2. CONTEXT AND INTERACTION THEORY REVIEW

Generally speaking, the language context can be divided into two major types, situational context and sociocultural context. Context is the relevant constraints of the communicative situation that influence language use, language variation, and discourse. Context, namely, language environment, is what a language and communication depends on to exist and develop.

Rivers suggests that items of language in total isolation have no function; they need a system and a setting to give them both function and meaning. Children often ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, without seeing the need to provide anything for it; too quick and too casual a reply can often have unexpected consequences, e.g. When the child asks what cricket is and you say it is a game, and then discover that it was a "cricket" in the context of insects. Even if we know the strict linguistics, we still need to check further the situation and even the society and culture to be sure of what item of the language is appropriate or acceptable.

In a narrow sense, the language context means the situational context. In Holliday's opinion, the situational contexts include the setting, the way of talking, and participants.

The situational context and sociocultural context can't be isolated from each other. In certain sociocultural context, people must obey the particular communicative rules when they use a certain language. And in a certain situational context, people should not only pay attention to the social communication rules but also adjust themselves according to the factors of the situational context. That is to say, the situational context and sociocultural context affect each other and they are complementary to each other.

According to Holliday's functional grammar, context can be divided into cultural and situational context. Cultural context is the social context of the linguistic code and the cultural context is seen as a network of information systems, and the social context of language behavior is the situation in which socio-cultural meanings are exchanged by means of, amongst other things, the

linguistic code. Situational context is the situation in which communications take place. In Halliday's opinion, the situational contexts include the setting, the way of talking, and participants.

But Hymes divides context into eight elements, setting, role, function, notion, style, stress and intonation, grammar, vocabulary and language aids. These factors affect each other and decide which language form is appropriate.

Language understanding is the important part of communication, while understanding and expressing the meanings of language and the realization of language functions must be through the context. Firth believes that in different contexts, the same word doesn't convey the same meaning. The context can help students to memorize words, determine the word meaning, eliminate different word interpretation, understand words in relation to the socio-culture background, guess word meanings, understand the connotation and denotation of words. English movies combine language, emotion, visual-audio stimulation in almost every cognitive sense. Their cultural and situational context are beneficial to constructing a vocabulary context in teaching, increasing the integration of the known with the unknown, accelerating the reconstruction of psychological schema, and then cultivating the efficiency of vocabulary drawn from memory system. Watching English movies can help consolidate and improve English vocabulary and phrases memorization, comprehension, and deep connotation. Pragmatic context imperceptibly influence the acquisition of vocabulary.

American linguist Brown believes that teaching should be in accordance with the interaction of cognition, emotion, and linguistic theories. Cognition is mainly related to the learners' mental function, including autonomic learning, meaningful learning and strategic cognition input. Emotion theory includes language ego, self-confidence, and encouragement of adventurous spirit. Linguistic theory covers the role of native language, characteristics of inter-language and cultivation of communicative abilities. The interactive approach to college English teaching theory believes that successful language learning depends on the combined action of the learners' inner psychological mechanism and language environment. Only if the learners' inner psychological mechanism and language input influence each other and interact with each other, learners can carry out language communication and social interaction, can a language be efficiently acquired. The interactive approach to teaching theory emphasizes language acquisition through communication and interaction. The interaction is multi-dimensional and multi-directional. From the perspective of English movies, interaction includes the interaction between the characters and scenes, audience and the movies, readers and the captions, teachers and students, two languages, languages and cultures. From

the perspective of vocabulary acquisition, the interaction includes those between vocabulary and context, input and output, persons and persons, humans and computers.

Given our college students' weak vocabulary output ability, while making full use of the English movie situation input, we should emphasize the output interaction to learn more. Study for the purpose of application, learn more for application, and acquire the vocabulary through the verbal or nonverbal context.

3. DISCUSSION

From the above analysis, we can roughly conclude that captioned movies could be helpful to our Chinese students' incidental vocabulary acquisition, culture awareness and facilitate their language output. So the following is about how we can make use of the captioned movies.

Select the movies based on the college English vocabularies and phrases. Analyze captions of the movie and use the word frequency to choose the appropriate movies. With reference to the word frequency and active words, teachers should consider the target vocabulary whether the English movies can provide enough frequently used vocabulary, design enough activities to ensure the input, assimilation and output.

Choose the movies with enough and clear languages input. Avoid too many obscure words, or slangs or curses. Avoid movies with too many violent scenes. The suitable movies should cover the words required by the syllabus and words used in daily life. The number of the new words or phrases should be limited. With Chinese captions for reference, incidental vocabulary would be acquired.

Classify the movies. The comprehension difficulty and vocabulary difficulty should be appropriate for the students' English levels. Classify the movies according to their subject and language difficulty into elementary, intermediate and advanced levels and provide students in different level. Proceed in an orderly way and step by step, from easy to hard. For example, cartoon movies could be suitable for the beginners, *Forrest Gump*, *The Terminal*, *Everybody's Fine*, for the intermediate level students, and *The Beautiful Mind*, *Legally Blonde* for the advanced students.

Choose the movies with their subjects and contents close to life. The stories should not be too complicated, but lively and interesting, positive and healthy, which could arouse students' interests. Teachers need to sort out the relative background. While teaching in class, teachers could play the video clip to illustrate one point or to help students remember some words.

Choose the movie with natural, clear and standard pronunciation. The speed of the movies should not be too fast, especially the video clip should be appropriate for the students to imitate the pronunciation, intonation and rhythm. The film and the video could be separated for

students' practice.

Pay attention to the edit of the video clip. Edit the movie clip to cover more target vocabularies for students' particular study. Because of the limited time in class, only part of the movie could be taught, and then the whole movie could only be enjoyed and studied after class. Prepare enough resources for students, video clip or the whole movie, for students' intensive and extensive watching, class room guidance study and self-study after class; thus to help students construct their own principal role.

Design enough interactive vocabulary activities in the context of English movies.

Interactive activities are the key link, which could appropriately improve students' vocabulary output ability. When we construct the movie banks, we next should design all kinds of activities to help students memorize the words.

Word games include guessing the character, the film name, and sentence completion. Before the movie watching, brainstorming the students with words according to their subject, this would diversify their thinking, activate their vocabulary schema, and compensate each other. Teachers could provide correction and catalogue the words.

Design questions to guide the watching. The questions may be about the whole movie or just about the details, leading students to appreciate the movie with purposes, capture meaningful information and exchange their ideas. In the process of watching, teachers could pause the video to ask students to guess the development of the story, thus improving their listening, speaking, writing and thinking ability.

Dictation can check students' sound distinguishing ability and meanwhile check their spelling. Dictation can include the words, phrases and clause to test their intensive listening.

Imitate the characters' lines or recite their lines. Imitation and recitation would correct students' pronunciation, improve language sense and listening and speaking.

Write a summary or review of the movie. After watching a film, a summary or review will help students to use and then apply the words they have seen and then grasp more words.

Read the captions or the original version, which will help students to appreciate the wisdom of English, to understand other countries' society, culture and history, to enlarge their vocabulary, to cultivate their literature taste. Teachers can design blanks filling. Try to help students to combine reading appreciation with movie enjoyment.

Investigate the culture. Chinese students lack experiences abroad, so discussion to probe in cultures in foreign countries could be both beneficial to raise culture awareness and to acquire more words.

With more autonomic study software installed, English

movies will be more widely used. Teacher should exert a leading role in students' autonomic study. With emphasis on the target vocabularies, construct a powerful movie bank to provide enough materials for students to improve their listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating.

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