USE OF FILMS IN ELT: A MASS TO CLASS APPROACH

Ms. Saptaparna Roy
Department of Humanities
Heritage Institute of Technology- Kolkata, Kolkata, India
saptaparna.roy2013@gmail.com, saptaparna.roy@heritageit.edu

Abstract- **The interface of technology with English Language Teaching has phenomenally affected pedagogy. A media mix can be exploited in teaching the target language in a learner-centred classroom. Given the environment of the Language Laboratory in Indian colleges, apposite tools can be selected based on the need analysis of a group constituting heterogeneous learners from English or vernacular medium schools, having different learning styles. This paper will explore the appropriateness, application and impact of using films as a technological tool in the classroom. Film, a mass medium, has been long established as a powerful conveyor of popular culture, a people and their language. This mass approach can be effectively utilized as a class approach in ELT. The judicious choice of films fulfilling the objectives of a course will be demonstrated through an instance in point, detailing the previewing, viewing and post-viewing activities. The paper will infer how films serve the purpose of edutainment in the development of language competency.**

Index Terms- **Learning styles, need analysis, films, language competency, edutainment.**

I. INTRODUCTION

"Today in our cities, most learning occurs outside the classroom. The sheer quantity of information conveyed by press- magazines- film- TV- radio far exceeds the quantity of information conveyed by school instruction and texts. This challenge has destroyed the monopoly of the books as a teaching aid and cracked the very walls of the classroom so suddenly that we're confused, baffled..." (Sontag, 1968) [1]

Mass media, as Susan Sontag emphasizes, have created a tremendous impact on learning. The influence of mass media ranges from the linguistic, psychological to the social. Contrary to the conventional medium of instruction through books, mass media ushers a "new" language of communication. Marshall McLuhan states that mass media such as film, television and radio are new languages that have a new grammar which is yet unexplored [2]. "Radio, film, TV pushed written expression towards the spontaneous shifts and freedom of the spoken idiom. They aided us in the recovery of intense awareness of facial language and bodily gesture" (Sontag, 1968) [3]. The new language has the potency to communicate emotively and intelligently which words alone cannot achieve. Print message "...means it must first be broken down into parts and then mediated eyedropper fashion, one thing at a time, in an abstract, linear, fragmented, sequential way" (Rosenthal, 1969) [4]. Mass media appeals either to the eye or ear or both involving the spoken and the written word and still or moving images in a variety of combinations. This paper will explore and establish how films can be used as an authentic medium for language development in the ELT classroom of Indian technical colleges for the undergraduate programme.

II. MEDIA SELECTION

The selection of media in the language classroom must be informed by an awareness of its impact on the learners and the fulfilment of the skills to be acquired by them. In the case of films the reception skills of learners is honed but the risk of passivity needs to be eliminated through a well-designed teaching methodology. Here the role of the traditional teacher transmogrifies into that of a facilitator actively engaged in the teaching-learning process. The context under review is that of NET Generation learners at the undergraduate level pursuing B.Tech degree, hailing from either English medium or vernacular medium schools. Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001) [5] is the term that is used today to refer to such students who are adept at using technology. Their expertise at interfacing with computers, internet and video games makes them the native users of the Digital language. From texting, playing PC or video games, listening to music, watching films on iPad, to speaking on iPhones, students undertake multi-tasking in a digital media environment. Their interaction with technology has enabled them to be quick decision makers who can perform complex tasks (Prensky, 2006) [6]. Pedagogy needs to be framed in a way that can exploit these acquired capabilities of learners. Facilitators are, contrarily, digital immigrants for whom Digital is the second language- a language that they continue to learn and cope with.

III. LEARNING STYLES

Digital language binds this heterogeneous group of learners having different learning styles, multiple intelligences and language acquisition levels. They are appositely trained in the technology-enabled Language Laboratory. The target language English- the language of professional or business exchange- is required to be developed as a part of their overall employability quotient. The course Language Practice Lab in the AICTE course structure for the 1st year B.Tech programme has two hours of practical lab per week allotted for a group of 30 students. It has been generally observed that learners from vernacular medium schools are aware of the grammar of the language, or the *langue* to put it in Saussure's term [7]. They may know the implicit system of elements, of distinctions or oppositions and the principles of combination that make it possible for the speaker to produce and the auditor to interpret the *parole* or the actual meaningful utterance. What is necessary here is *performance* in Chomsky's words rather than *competence* that is the tacit knowledge of the language internalized by the learners [8]. The greatest challenge for the

instructor is to design a pedagogy that will attempt to bring parity in the language competency level, address the needs of all learners and involve LSRW skills of language learning. Each individual learner in the classroom has preferred learning styles. Learning style is the natural, habitual way in the acquisition and interpretation of information in learning situations. Learning styles are relatively innate qualities in the behaviour of individual learners. They reflect genetic coding, personality, development, motivation, and environmental adaptation. Though no definitive study has proven that pedagogy in consonance with learning styles has resulted in better productivity, yet an awareness of learning styles is fruitful.

Information processing system greatly impacts the learning style of individuals and an analysis of it can help resolve learning difficulties. Attention, perception, retention, integration and retrieval are a part of the information processing system. A comprehensive study of this can advance student learning. Since experiential learning in the classroom is possibly the most apposite method, the input and output in terms of experience assimilation and experience translation needs to be assessed. There are several models proposed by theorists on learning styles and assessment tools to ascertain them. But during an activity more than one preferred approach of the learner is combined as will be demonstrated in the use of films. Film is a medium that is a multi-sensory resource catering to the diverse sense perceptions of learners.

IV. VAK MODEL

Incidentally, Neil Fleming's VAK/ VARK model is suitable for consideration in this context [9]. He categorises learners into Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic based on the different types of learning styles. Fleming explained that Visual learners perceive by seeing and their cognition is through the written word, pictures, graphs, diagrams, charts, symbols, visual aids, drawing timelines for events. Listening is the preferred mode for Auditory learners. Audio tapes, discussions, debates, lectures, dialogues, oral presentations work best for them. Kinaesthetic or tactile learners assimilate through experience by doing or performing as in experiments, dramatisation or role plays, projects, field work. To fulfil the learning modes and needs of learners in a heterogeneous group, pedagogy must be framed in a way whereby all approaches are well blended. Interestingly, Marilee Sprenger in her book *Differentiation through Learning Styles and Memory* espouses the following three premises: 1) teachers can be learners, and learners teachers; we are all both, 2) everyone can learn under the right circumstances and 3) learning is fun; make it appealing [10].

V. USING FILMS

Films provide a strong sensory experience that learners wish to repeat by watching the same film over and over again. The emotional and cognitive impression that films create can be utilized by the facilitator as an authentic teaching tool. Films rivet the attention of learners and align their concentration. Learners across any age find deep interest in them as films often create suspense or anticipation and heighten excitement. Since multi-media learning provides trans-sensory experience, films act as an energizer or stress-buster. Learners' imagination is triggered and the visual impression leads to a focus on the content. Watching films in a class provides an environment of community viewing and hence group cohesion and collaborative learning develops between all learners and the instructor. When used innovatively, films result in idea generation and expression, profound understanding and higher retention of content. Films leave an indelible impact on the mind thereby inspiring viewers and making the teaching-learning process an extension of edutainment. Edutainment, a portmanteau word combining education and entertainment, makes learning fun.

VI. DUAL CODING OF MULTI-MEDIA LEARNING

Many theories have established the dual coding of verbal and non-verbal communication and have been applied to multi-media learning and its efficacy in the classroom. The investigative studies have probed how films achieve the combined effect of verbal incorporating visual, auditory, or articulatory codes, and non-verbal comprising shapes, sounds, kinaesthetic actions, and emotions. The cognitive theory of learning proposed by Mayer's (2001) functions through five stages- choosing appropriate words for decoding in verbal working memory, identifying apposite images for processing in visual working memory, arranging chosen words in a verbal cognition model, ordering selected images in a visual cognition model and integration of verbal and visual depiction with former knowledge [11]. Mayer's theory combines Sweller's (1999 [12]; Chandler & Sweller, 1991[13]) cognitive load theory, Baddeley's (1999) working memory model [14], and Paivio's (1986 [15]; Clark & Paivio, 1991[16]) dual-coding theory. Mayer's investigation proves that the simultaneous presentation of the verbal and visual as in films with integrated dialogic discourse is most productive for visual/spatial learners and even lower achieving students. Research findings have demonstrated the use of videos or films in diverse areas such as teacher education, psychology and psychiatry, counselling, and medicine, political science and management/leadership, nursing, sociology, health intervention and interpersonal communication (Proctor & Adler, 1991) [17], visual literacy (Teasley & Wilder, 1994)[18], critical thinking (Leland, 1994[19]; Payne, 1993)[20], writing (Leland, 1994) [21], second-language learning (Chapple & Curtis, 2000) [22]; Liu, 2005[23]; Plass, Chun, Mayer, & Leutner, 1998 [24]; Salaberry, 2001) [25], active learning (Greg, Hosley, Weng, & Montemayor, 1995) [26], and multicultural diversity and sensitivity training (Pinteris & Atkinson, 1998 [27]; Tyler & Guth, 1999) [28]. The appropriateness of films as a classroom teaching media at the college level has been established by these descriptive or empirical studies. Dual coding theory of multimedia learning integrating auditory/verbal and visual/pictorial stimuli foster higher memory, understanding, and deeper learning than a single stimulus taken individually. Learning is better in the video and audiovisual mode than the verbal-audio mode. This assertion is in tandem with the picture superiority effect (Nelson, Reed, & Walling, 1976 [29]; Paivio, Rogers, & Smythe, 1968) [30].

VII. FILM SELECTION

Facilitators will have to decide on the kind of film they should share with the learners. The selection parameters in terms of the type, duration, content and context, theme, language, action and characters of the film will depend on the objective of learning. The course and its purpose, the age group of learners, gender, racial, ethnic and cultural background, and dominant language of the class are the factors that will influence the choice of films. The content of the film must not contain anything offensive to affect the sentiments of the learners.

A recent film *English Vinglish* [31] released in 2012 in India is the instance in point that will be used to illustrate the hypothesis for this paper. Shashi Godbole, the protagonist played by Sridevi is a role inspired by the Director Gauri Shinde's mother. Shashi is a simple, dedicated Indian housewife who is very passionate about her home-run business of making laddoos. She is depicted as a committed homemaker who fulfils all household responsibilities but is unable to win the respect of her husband and daughter. Both of them ridicule Shashi's lack of English speaking skills. But it is Shashi who corrects her children's pronunciation of Hindi words and tries to sow Indian values in them. Shashi is made to develop a low self-esteem due to the repeated insults from her husband, Satish and daughter, Sapna. She reads a Hindi daily at home. Shashi once emotionally remarks that since all important talks happen only in English, there is hardly any communication between her and her husband. Shashi pronounces the word "Jazz" as "Jhass" (the dance form that her daughter learns) to which her daughter breaks into peals of laughter. But Shashi does not lose hope. She continues to mentally rehearse the correct pronunciation of the word on her own. In fact, she corrects the enunciation of the word "gifts" as uttered by the delivery man who works for her to distribute the laddoos that she makes. Sapna mocks her mother for her incapacity to teach English Literature. Shashi's embarrassment is not only restricted to the home but also spreads to social interactions. Her daughter feels ashamed to take Shashi to her school for the parent-teacher meeting. Shashi is excited to see Sapna's classroom and wants to take a look at her "seat". Sapna ruthlessly corrects her by stating that it is not her "seat" but "desk". Shashi meets Neelam, the mother of Sapna's friend, who speaks to Shashi in English. Shashi is discomforted while trying to strike a conversation with her. Sapna intervenes to salvage the situation and responds to Neelam in English on her mother's behalf. Irrespective of her difficulty in speaking the language, Shashi manages to communicate with Sapna's English teacher. She confidently intercepts, "My English not good" when Father starts speaking to her in English and states that she is comfortable speaking in Hindi. Interestingly, Father admits that he is not very fluent in Hindi which is the national language, implying that one ought to have a workable knowledge of Hindi. Shashi and Father both have a vibrant exchange after rejecting English as the lingua franca and selecting Hindi as the medium of conversation. Shashi's concern is whether her daughter is good in English but at the same time she enquires about Sapna's behaviour towards others. Sapna is irate at the way her mother speaks to her teacher. A sense of failure gnaws at

Shashi and she is projected as a social misfit since communication in English is seen as a mark of social recognition, power and dominance.

The complication in the plot arises when Shashi has to visit New York all by herself to assist her sister Manu in arranging the wedding of her niece. She immediately starts reading English newspapers at home. Her experience at the immigration where she must answer questions in English was quite unnerving for her. A white employee remarked that since she doesn't know English, how will she manage in the US! An Indian employee intrudes to make a sarcastic comment to the foreigner, mentioning that she will manage the same way that the foreigner has managed without knowing Hindi in India. Initially, she was afraid of beckoning the flight attendants for any help. On the flight to America Shashi comes across a very helpful co-passenger who instils confidence in her. He translates an English film into Hindi for her so that she can appreciate and enjoy the film. While navigating the city, her niece names Manhattan which Shashi finds difficult to pronounce. Her niece breaks the word "Manhattan" into syllables comically- "man", "hat" and "tan". Her final embarrassment occurs at a coffee shop where she fails to explain what she wants to eat. This propels her to secretly register at a four-week Learn to Speak English Class at the New York Language Centre. In the cosmopolitan class Shashi meets David Fischer, the instructor; Eva, a Mexican nanny; Salman Khan, a Pakistani cab driver; Yu Son, a Chinese hairstylist; Ramamurthy, a Tamil software engineer; Udumbke, a young African-Caribbean man; and Laurent, a French chef. The English class exemplifies a world community as it were since it consists of people from different nationalities, religions and gender orientations. For each learner in the class, English is a foreign language, the acquisition of which will ensure familial, social and professional success. The isolation of the gay African-Caribbean learner suggests the double marginalisation of the individual, first as an African-Caribbean in the land of its imperialist and second as a gay. David the instructor is a gay too and being separated from his partner, finds Udumbke as his new friend. The other classmates apart from Shashi find them 'queer'. The English class is a cultural matrix that opens a paradigm of hybridity and heterogeneity. What is established through the film is the kernel of humanity, tolerance.

It is for the first time, Shashi is made to realise that she is an artist because she is a good cook and an 'entrepreneur'. She experiences how communication can take place through emotions even when both parties involved in the process do not understand each others' language. Her interaction with the French Chef is a unique experiential learning for her when she infers that "It is good to talk without understanding". She regained her long lost self-image of a bright, beautiful and talented woman through the love, care and respect extended by her classmates. She diligently completes her homework and watches English films and news on television to develop her vocabulary. At the climax of the film Shashi, the upright, confident woman, surprises her husband and daughter by raising a toast in English for the newly wed couple. She emphasises how the family is the safest institution wherein inmates are made to feel secure and happy irrespective of their

weaknesses. A subtle message is communicated to her family through this and both Satish and Sapna repent their misdemeanour towards Shashi. She qualifies the final assessment of her Language Class and is certified by her Trainer David in the presence of her classmates and all other invitees at the wedding ceremony. Incidentally, Shashi on the way back to India asks the flight attendant in flawless English to give her a Hindi newspaper. Though she is able to read English yet she expresses her deep rootedness in her own culture and its values. While English is ensconced as the language of power, yet a subversive strain undercuts the film. As a corollary to the new language learning and its cultural appropriation, disrespecting one's mother tongue and culture is demonstrated as an act of derision. The major strands of the film have been outlined to suggest the purpose for which this film can be used in the ELT classroom, not only for language learning but also for immersing into another socio-cultural, geographical, economic environment and its politics of culture.

VIII.   CONCLUSION

A. Pre-viewing Activity

The film itself suggests some effective English language learning methodologies such as reading English newspapers, watching English films, news and programmes; vocabulary building activities such as scramble; speaking activity such as extempore; pronunciation of vowel and consonantal sounds; grammar exercises on articles, nouns, tense; framing questions; and map reading. As a pre-viewing activity, learners can be asked to write individually about their fears, apprehensions and problems with respect to the target language, English. All learners may not feel at ease to share their personal difficulties before the whole class. The film viewing can be assigned as an outside-the-classroom activity. But if the whole group watches this 134 minutes film within the two-hour Language Lab class, a sense of community viewing leading to empathy and cohesion among learners can be achieved in the classroom itself. In fact, the very same film can be utilized for covering the four skills of language learning. As such, viewing the film in the classroom will not be wastage of time as often perceived by trainers. Incidentally, in the film the students of the English Class indulge in group viewing by watching *The Last Time I Saw Paris*.

B. Viewing Activity

While watching, learners may take notes in their notebook on the striking features of the film. Instructors must give clear directions to the students about noting any incomprehensible word/ part of the film. *English Vinglish* is a Hindi film with English dialogues. Since in India we follow the tri-language structure, the film can be understood by all learners in the context under review. Facilitators can also select the same film with subtitles where reading them along with viewing can lead to a different set of activities.

C. Post- viewing Activity

All the activities suggested are based on the principle of TBL or Task Based Learning wherein activities are designed to allow learners to creatively produce the language rather than replicate what they have listened to [32].

Suggested Activities

- The facilitator can elicit responses from the learners on what they feel about the film. They can relate to what they had scripted about their fear of the language in the previewing activity. After the group discussion, the instructor can guide them on how to write a film review. A writing task whereby the learners express their opinion on the film in their own words can be conducted. Since the film is in Hindi and the task needs to be done in English, learners will have to transcreate the film. This activity will effectively combine writing skill and critical thinking.
- If the same film can be shown in a version with subtitles, then a reading activity can be woven simultaneously with the viewing. In *English Vinglish*, the protagonist learns English by reading subtitles to understand the films in the foreign language.
- An activity on listening comprehension can be developed by framing questions to which direct answers are not available in the film. For example, what Indian values and ethics are highlighted in the film? Or, what differences between Indian and American culture did the film uphold?
- As far as the speaking activity is concerned, the facilitator can select situations from the film and conduct role plays wherein learners will enact in groups. This will help them generate dialogues in English on their own and appropriate the situation to their own context. For example, learners may be asked to discuss in small groups and then enact the most embarrassing situation faced in their lives due to their lack of proficiency in English.

As expatiated through the instance of *English Vinglish*, facilitators can use films or clippings from films to suit their purpose of teaching English to different levels of learners in the classroom. This paper opens avenues for research that can conclusively establish how films, a mass media affects the language competency of the general masses to co-relate the findings with the possibilities of such improvement among learners in the classroom.

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