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Science Fiction Movies as a Matrix for Teaching Grammatical and Lexical Items

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Science Fiction and “Edutainment”

“A picture is worth a thousand words” goes the adage. When a picture comes alive, it produces wonders. Movies with such wonderful quality provide a plethora of opportunities for teaching grammatical items and have also become one of the main concerns of the modern way of teaching. Among the various genres of movies, science fiction occupies an important place inside a classroom, on account of the fascinating nature of innovative ideas introduced through them.



Technological advancement is a boon for the teachers to use various electronic tools of communication for developing the language skills of students within the classroom.

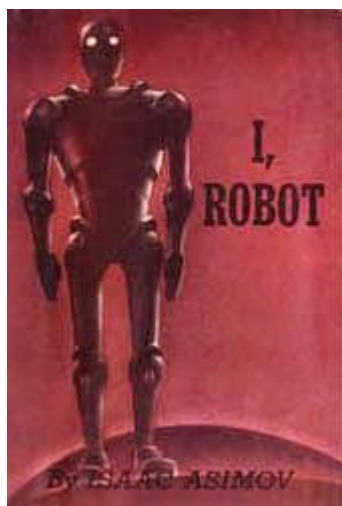
Language teaching is facilitated through the availability of many of these tools and, in turn, creates the situations, where teachers become facilitators for the students, helping them acquire the language.

Science fiction movies, originally a means of entertainment, have now turned into a source of *edutainment* with their use in the language class. The dual purpose of these types of movies makes them fit enough to be learning material, since they receive the undivided attention of students across the disciplines, apart from the educational value they possess.

Extra-terrestrial and Language Teaching

Science fiction movies with a story line about extra-terrestrial happenings and outlandish acting performance can make an indelible impact on learners, since panoramic view of real-life situations in microcosm also find a way into the strange imaginative world depicted in the movies. They provide an opportunity for the students to identify themselves

with the characters and to think creatively, to seek a solution for the problems that their favourite character encounters in the imaginative world. The language teachers can make use of this habit of their learners by utilizing science fiction for teaching grammatical items.



The teacher can, thus, prepare the learners mentally for the ‘virtual’ life situations. The learners will be in a position to internalise the new, exploratory and imaginative world with the necessary vocabulary and spoken linguistic aspects of language, which characters employ in the movie.

Providing Comprehensible Inputs



The situations in the movies provide the much needed “large amount of comprehensible inputs” which Krashen points out in his Language Acquisition Theory for gaining fluency in the target language (Richards 182). Without visuals, the input may be beyond the comprehension of some learners. The extra-terrestrial world with its strange and sometimes eerie happenings needs much time and effort on the part of the teachers to make them understand. Unlike in other movies, some hitherto unknown circumstances are seen in

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these movies; new coinages of words which will gain currency later are heard owing to the imaginatively constructed world. Hence, science fiction movies are a good source of comprehensible input to the language teachers.

Science Fiction and Use of Authentic Language

Several studies confirm the “use of authentic language” when movies are used in the class for language learning. Lonergan’s findings show the arousal of interest and motivation with the use of science fiction, romance and historical movies (qtd. in Tsai).

Some words came into circulation because of these movies. Not only the display of invented appliances or tools, but also the growth of language is made possible with these movies.

Images for the Use of Words

These movies provide precise images and hence, learners understand what they refer to and the application of words in context. Some words are inexplicable even in the regional languages since learners are not familiar with the objects and the concepts. The learner may come across such words while reading the novels and find it difficult to conjure up images of them. So, movies facilitate the understanding of the concepts and make learning memorable.

Preference for Conditional Clauses

Apart from teaching of other grammatical items, conditional clauses, especially, the rejected and imaginary conditional ones can be taught effectively with movies. The clippings or the whole movie provide the context for the target language. The context provided both visually and verbally, forms the basis for the new or unavailable twist in the story. The twist can be either teacher or student created to improve or check the language skills. To Rinvoluceri, understanding the context is made easy with this linguistic and psychological technique, for learners of any age and culture.

Imagination Helps Grammatical Usage

If the creation of sudden change in the story line is left to the imagination of learners, grammar will not be Greek and Latin to learners and many such interesting twists will be possible with science fiction movies. Learners who have equipped themselves with necessary

knowledge about the latest inventions, tend to imagine wildly and may learn the target structure thoroughly.

Teaching Narrative and Argumentative Pieces

Teachers find using the movie clippings beneficial to teach narrative, descriptive and argumentative pieces of writing. Themes of these movies and the various issues involved are a platform for discussion.

Helps Reduce the Impact of Emotive Factors

The affective filter hypothesis of Krashen emphasizes the need for lowering the affective filter, which results from learner's emotions and attitude towards learning English as a second language and slows down the acquisition of language (Richards 183). When the movies are interesting and appealing, learners will not feel the class monotonous and will be receptive to the new approach to learning and teaching.

Fostering Critical Thinking and Conversation

Hit movies like "Enthiran" in Tamil, Hindi and Telugu can captivate the attention of the learners as well as encourage them to think critically, when the question is about how the situation would have been/will be if the situation presented in the movie was/is different.

The discussion can be on:

1. What would happen to the heroine, if the hero did not dismantle the robot, Chiti?
2. If you were in the place of the hero, how would you manage the situation when the robot fell in love with your lady love?
3. Imagine that you are a scientist, how would you like your version of robot to be.

Sentence Construction Facilitated

These questions will enable the learner to be thorough with the particular type of sentence constructions as well as the different discourse types in the target language. Such questions also help the teachers check the comprehension of learners.

Even if science fiction movies in a regional language is chosen, it will not pose any problem since understanding the circumstances in regional language is more likely than

movies in the target language. And we can certainly use the familiar ground to practice and generate in English in our classrooms.

Above all, learners can understand well the difference between the language that is employed in a scientific or technological piece of writing and the one that is found in the fiction world – whatever the genre may be.

Use of Science Fiction makes Teaching Student-Centric

Teaching becomes student-centric, individualised and more relevant to the needs of students, as enough practice in the target language can be carried out with the movies. It is all clear to everyone that student-centric teaching and practice will bring out better skills.

The movie can be edited to suit the needs of the learners in developing their language skills. The software needed for that purpose is available and known to many computer users nowadays. Hence, preplanning is necessary for the use of movies in the class.

Those students who miss watching the movie in the theatre may not find themselves unfortunate if multimodal teaching is at hand in the educational institutions. However, a lot of encouragement is needed from the concerned authorities in the educational institutions for employing these types of movies, which bring great advantage to the learners if they can be used in the class.

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