Innovative Use of English Films in the Language Classrooms to Teach and Inspire Students of Technology

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ABSTRACT - **In today's world, Innovation is a** *must* **in all fields, including Education. Language teaching too has undergone many changes. The easy access of internet and popular media has given sufficient ground to language instructors to rethink English Language Teaching.**

In this paper it has been our endeavour to show through an observed study how English movies, not only made Language Learning a more activity-oriented and enjoyable process, but also aroused the students' scientific interest towards a better understanding of their core technical curriculum.

Keywords: Language learning, English films, students of technology, pronunciation, vocabulary, motivation, activity-based learning, scientific knowledge, spirit of enquiry.

I.   INTRODUCTION

In this Twenty First Century, Innovation is a must in all fields, including Education. Language teaching too has undergone many changes. The easy access of Internet and Popular Media has given sufficient ground to language instructors to rethink English Language Teaching. Our present study highlights how Science Fiction Films(popularly referred to as 'Sci-fi Movies') were used in an innovative manner in the language teaching classrooms to teach and inspire students of technology.

1.1 Background

Science fiction is generally categorized in two extreme categories: either it is for the 'nerds' or it is relegated to the realm of mere fantasy, or even deceptively referred to as 'pulp fiction."Yet, Sci-fimovies may have an instant appeal especially for Engineering college goers in the age group of 18 to 22. At the same time the Hollywood, accents of the *movie actors and* the esoteric world of outer space, *as seen in the sci-fi movies,* might even seem alien and slightly frightening to the uninitiated cine-goers *coming e*specially from the rural *or* semi-rural *background.* Yet, *these movies* may also have the potential of attracting these learners who are just beginning to be young adults, into the tantalizing world of Hollywood and of the world yonder into the fantastic realms of the Milky Way *of the Sci-fi English movies.*

II.   METHODOLOGY

It was this world of excitement, of thrills of scientific enquiry that we, the faculty members,*wanted* to tap into our state of the art Language Laboratory classes, and in our everyday classrooms having LCD's and whitewashed walls. English*may* seem *to be* an alien, abstract, and a difficult subject, or even at best a bland one *to most of these first generation learners of the language*. We decided we could try to engage our students in language teaching by showing them English movies, while at the same time following the guidelines of the syllabus of Maulana Abul Kalam University(MAKAUT).Could we successfully arouse the interests of our students if they could listen enthralled to the dialogues of movie stars and venture into outer space?

At the simplest level-at the entry point in the college ie at the very beginning of **the First Semester w**hen the hesitant First year *students* walked into our Language Laboratory, we wanted them to teach them about the basics of interpersonal communication, the rudiments of pronunciation, and about situational dialogues by using both sci-fi movies, as well as movies based on social concerns, or even classics.

A similar exercise was planned in the aforementioned lab-based English papers of the second and third and fourth year B.Tech students as well. However, this time exclusively sci-fi movies were selected to be used in the English language classes.

As mentioned above it was decided to carry out this activity for all students both in the Language Laboratory itself, as well as in the traditional classroom. In the Language Laboratory there was the OHP, Sound system as well as a white screen. In the lecture rooms it was decided that the overhead projectors would be used, but in the classroom walls would act as a screen. Our study suggests therefore that these innovative ideas can

be applied even with the basic facilities available anywhere in the world.

III.   DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

In the First year syllabus of MAKAUT there was role play, situational dialogues and the like prescribed for the Language Practice Labs. So, one of the first movies we showed was in fact the endearing movie *English Vinglish*. Why we chose this film was because it showed a struggling housewife, played by the brilliant and charming actress late Sridevi, facing difficulties in a foreign land because she was not being able to use English *in day to day conversations*. The film helped our students identify with the character,r and it also provided them with the courage to gradually overcome their fear of ridicule and muster enough courage and speak out, even though falteringly, whatever was in their mind and hearts. *Since it was predominantly a Bollywood movie dealing with Indian characters, the students felt culturally affiliated to the story and could also follow the accent easily.*

The First year students were also shown movies like *A Beautiful Mind* or **even *The Man Who Knew Infinity*.** We had even thought of purchasing the book on which *The Man Who Knew Infinity* had been based, but were left wondering as to how many would actually read it. Watching the movie would be easier for the young learners.

Watching the movies might initially have been difficult for the students but as they watched together in small lab groups on the projector screens in the Language lab, or on the whitewashed walls of the big classroom they were gradually more comfortable about the English accents.

English Accents

In terms of getting acquainted with the English accent of the actors,**'The Man Who Knew Infinity'was one step ahead of 'English Vinglish'**. While the central character Ramanujan spoke English with a mild rural accent, the English characters such as Mr. Hardy spoke with the Queen's accent. This contrast helped the learners to understand their own pitfalls in pronunciation of English words and thereby, improve their speaking skills. It also helped the students to follow the conversations easily in the next movie- **'A Beautiful Mind'-**where everyone spoke with a Hollywood accent. **This "graded" exposure to English pronunciation in the movies helped students to digest the language gradually, and make it their own, instead of experiencing a rude culture-shock.**

3.1 Activity based learning based on Movies:

3.1.1 Situational Dialogues

Thus, the aim of the faculty members of English department at our college was to integrate the movie watching with the syllabus. There were such activities like '**Situational Dialogues'** and the like in the syllabus. In earlier years while dealing with 'Situational Dialogues', situations had been given: like three friends were discussing movies like *3 idiots* or office colleagues were going to a party, or strangers were having a discussion on long train journeys. The fallout of this was that while students practiced their dialogues and submitted real life situations, they seemed to perform better in teams, and practice listening and speaking and using the correct language forms.

3.1.2Academic Activities after watching the Films

Now, however, after the movies had been showntothe class of 20 **students were further divided into four or five teams of four or five students each, and all the teams were asked to watch the movies** in their leisure hours once again and choose scenes which they found interesting or intriguing. **Having chosen a scene, the group would have to write out a script of their own in English based on the given situations in the films and enact it in class**. This interested the students a great deal, and on the day of class performance, each group not only acted out their particular bit but also submitted their files and even a CD, with the portion of the film they had enacted. The students were marked for their performance under Situational Dialogues and related activities in Language Laboratory so the entire teaching and evaluation was integrated with the University syllabus.

3.1.3 Other follow up activities

The whole exercise can be developed upon if the students can have videos of their performance, and if later on they submit it in the CD along with the film clip. These videos can also be uploaded on the youtube.

3.1.4 Advanced level language learning activities prescribed for these students such as Technical Report Writing, Power Point Presentation and the like :

When first it was enquired how many students had read sci-fi writings the response was very lukewarm. Though there were books by Arthur Clarke, Ray Bradbury and others in the college library, very few had ventured into that world. Yet we wanted to open up the exciting portals of science fiction to these students. Our success with the first years had offered us glimpses of hope that thesesci-fi might provide the breakthrough that was being looked for.

3.1.5. About the Second years

In the Second year syllabus of MAKAUT amongst all the things in the syllabus wasthere was Technical Report Writing. As in the rest of India, tailor-made reports were being churned out in dozens *in the language classrooms* on Railway Accidents, Scientific Experiments, fire hazards and numerous other similar topics.

2019 is the 50th year of NASA's Apollo Mission. It was suggested that we share the NASA report on the mission with the students. The students had of course, all heard about NASA, but we the faculty were very skeptical whether they would at all go through the voluminous report.

However, on a trial basis it was decided to show the movie Apollo 13 to the second year students. **H**onestly, it was like caviar, alien at first to their tastebuds, and yet the more they watched, the more they wanted more of it. **However, it was not merely as viewers, but as critical thinkers too that we wanted the students to evolve.** *It was felt necessary that the students should not only enter into the imaginative world of spacecraft and interstellar places, but also that they should correlate the NASA report with the movie they had watched. The result was astounding.*

Overcoming their natural reluctance to submit written assignments, each group of students (comprising 3 or 4 students) submitted the reports along with CDs. **Students who had earlier no knowledge about the whereabouts of NASA had created CDs with taglines like "Houstan we have a problem".**

In their reports they had not only analysed the movie, but actually taken the trouble of analyzing the possible causes of the failure of the mission. The more forward thinking amongst the students had even had the foresight and wisdom to understand how Apollo13 *mission* prepared the way for other missions.

3.1.6 Third year and Final year students:

The results were even more spectacular with third year students. Movies like *Interstellar,Gravity, The Imitation Game* were shown to the students. **Christopher Nolan was someone** *about whom the students had* **hardly** heard about except for the one or two odd movie **buffs, but now he became dear to the heart of these budding Engineers.**

<u>On Blackholes and Wormholes:</u>

At the end of the semester,*the* 3rd year students **made a number of technical presentations** *on Interstellar and* **submitted files which had taglines of Christopher Nolan movies and the best was saved for the last bit.** Students created both files and CDs on the movies as part of the Project work. **Some students analysed the plots, characters, the devices used** *in* **such sci-fi movies. They also pointed out the human and inspirational values of how people had withstood and triumphed over an inclement environment of dust storms and blackholes.**

However, *one* of the most startling presentations was a file which had analysed the movie and focused upon the crisis point of the hero being drawn into another world to explore the complex, but exciting world of wormholes and blackholes. Students who were hitherto reluctant to open their mouths and speak, were here in their classrooms giving fantastic presentations on how the hero had been sucked into a blackhole and wormhole, and they went on to go into indepth **technical analysis of such abstract scientific phenomenon.**

IV.   CONCLUSION

- Since**'motivation' is a very important aspect of language learning, it was found that thoughonline teaching material had been used to develop the Language Skills** *earlier,* **specially the listening and reading** *skills,* now however the students seemed to be so immersed in the films, their written and oral performances suggested they seemed to unconsciously pick up greater interest *in learning the language* and *that too* at a faster speed.

- These movies proved to be inspirational to the learners. After watching '*The Man Who Knew Infinity'* our students learnt not only about following English accents, **they got to know the life of the great mathematician Ramanujan.** From their childhood days the students, even the best among them, just heard the names of these great figures, but rarely get to learn much about their achievements leave alone about the trials, tribulations of such great personages. For instance in the movie, when the brilliant, but poor Ramanujan, sets sail for England, and interacts with the likes of Professor Hardy, it becomes truly inspirational for a whole generation of learners.

- Not only writing skills, or listening skills, or analytical skills of the students, but more importantly, *this whole exercise* aroused in them the curiosity about the scientific discoveries, and outer space.

- *Reading is knowing, but seeing is believing. The technical glitches in the spacecraft that put the Apollo Mission in jeopardy on screen inspired the students to deliberate in detail on the probable causes of such glitches in the reports they submitted as their cumulative assessment.*

- The aesthetics displayed in submission of powerpoint-presentations and CDs; **the spirit of scientific enquiry; the urgency and clarity in speech; and the eager use of English**, clearly pointed out *that the creative drive of the learners may be channelized towards a better learning experience using movies in the English classroom.*

V.   RECOMMENDATIONS

It would be noteworthy for educators and policy makers that use of audio-visual material like the experience of watching the movies can be integrated with the advanced level language learning activities prescribed for students such as Technical Report Writing, Power Point Presentation etc.

- *This study clearly shows that the outcome of including the movies as part of English language curriculum of students of all years in a technical institution was not merely limited to the learning of the language skills better. It also helped the learners get involved in their core technical curriculum in a more imaginative, as well in a more creative manner.*

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