

Teaching Design for the Course of Movies Appreciation from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Pingli Lei

Guangdong Baiyun University, Guangzhou, Guangdong, 510450, China

Abstract—Currently, despite the fact that the course of English Movies Appreciation has been quite prevailing in each and every university and college in China, it is being given a low statue and undergoing a unitary and dull teaching method. This paper, however, based on the theory of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, explores a trial way in which movies can be utilized as the multimodal language carrier, and in which the teaching functions originally undertaken by more than one course are expected to be realized by the sole course of English Movies Appreciation.

Index Terms—the theory of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, the course of movies appreciation, teaching design

I. THE CURRENT TEACHING SITUATION FOR THE COURSE OF MOVIES APPRECIATION

Now with the development of multimedia technology and the popularization of multimedia equipments, a majority of colleges and universities in China have offered and are offering the course of Movies Appreciation to students. But the course is endowed with different meanings according to different teaching objects and purposes. If being an elective subject towards all students in some universities and colleges, it aims to give students some knowledge about the movie history, the primary schools for movies study and practice, basic movie technology, and a number of representative masterpieces as well, thereby enhancing students' humanistic and aesthetic qualities. On the other hand, some schools tend to provide non-English majors with the course of British and American Movies Appreciation for the reasons of versatile movie themes, rich contents, intriguing plots, and authentic language contained in the classical movies, which are likely to make students become more interested in learning English language. It has been early realized that, English movies appreciation can not only provide English learners with vivid and true-to-life visual scenes, but also with abundant language materials, giving students a maximum of language input by means of the double effects from audio and visual elements in a minimum of time, meanwhile, English movies can influence their sentiment and purify their minds, thus their language learning interest is to be inspired, their learning efficiency to be improved, their capacity for English listening and speaking to be enhanced, and their cultural knowledge about target language to be enriched. (Guan Jingjun, 2012)

For a long time, numerous Chinese teachers have conducted meticulous researches on how to execute the course of Movies Appreciation in a high level of efficiency, which result in abundant constructive comments and suggestions, but their research perspectives have been focusing on its supportive functions within the system of college English teaching, just obtaining some limited and narrow understandings about the teaching contents and methods. (Tang Liqin, 2009; He Qingmei, 2012; Liang Yan, 2012). Wholly, the current teaching for Movies Appreciation in China's colleges and universities hovers between two extremes: either being extremely entertaining, or being extremely academic. Being extremely entertaining: in movie appreciation classes, teachers merely show the movies, with the students enjoying them, without learning tasks that can induce information input. Also many teachers insert some clips of English movies into their teaching period for lecturing College English, just intended to introduce a topic related to the unit, or to trigger students' discussion on a certain issue. Still a number of teachers deliberately design the session of showing some clips of movies as a condiment for fear that the classes are too boring to appeal to their listeners. Additionally, there are some teachers who may fill the classes with movies just in the case that they have finished the lectures ahead of the teaching syllabus, or that they have not a good preparation for lectures to be delivered. Conversely, being extremely academic stands on the other pole, where some teachers put too much emphasis on analyzing the movie themes and characters during their classroom instruction, so that the course of Movies Appreciation seems quite monotonous, tedious and makes no sense, and as a result, students will gradually lose their interest in it.

There is no denying that the two extreme teaching modes mentioned above are not conducive to language teaching. Under this circumstance, in my opinion, the course English Movies Appreciation should be relocated, which owes a further development in terms of its academic value and course functions. We should set it as an independent and comprehensive course for students who major in English language. Based on the theory of multimodal discourse analysis, this paper has proposed some suggestions to readjust the teaching ideas and methods of English Movies Appreciation, employing a new multimodal and multidimensional way to supplant the traditional one that is simply

dominated by “showing” and “analyzing”, by which students’ English learning interest, aesthetics literacy and language level are hoped to be upgraded simultaneously.

II. THE THEORY OF MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND MULTIMODAL TEACHING

Multimodality refers to “the use of a variety of semiotic modes in symbol products or events” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 20). Whereas, a theory named Multimodal Discourse Analysis emerged in the nineties of last century and was developed since then by western researchers, who, on the basis of critical discourse analysis, combined the study achievements involving the fields of social semiotics, systemic functional grammar and the traditional discourse analysis theory. This booming theory holds that language is a social symbol, that other symbols apart from oral and written languages (including painting, music, dance, etc.) also belong to the category of language, and that multi language symbols are independent from but interactive to each other, which altogether produce and convey meanings. This theory breaks through the limitations of the traditional discourse analysis that merely conducted studies on the writing language, and extends the studies to various modal symbols such as picture, animation, color, font and etc.. Being concerned with the roles played by a variety of modal symbols, the theory of multimodal discourse analysis, up to now, has been widely involved in various fields. And it is particularly worth mentioning that, its role for giving a guideline to the foreign language teaching is increasingly significant, which hence has set off a research wave on multimodal teaching.

The so-called multimodal teaching mainly emphasizes the introduction of multi mode symbols (language, images, music, networking, and so on) into the teaching process to fully mobilize the students’ various senses(listening, seeing, tasting, touching and smelling), so as to enhance and broaden their understanding of new knowledge and the effects for their mastering what they have been exposed to. This method must have a greater influence on students than explaining with a single language does, and it is predicted to contribute to a better study result. Additionally, multi-modal teaching, using a variety of instructional methods (network, team cooperation, association and role playing), helps to mobilize learners’ enthusiasm to participate in the process of learning and teaching, to satisfy the demands of language learning for the combination of listening, speaking, writing and practicing, and, eventually to stimulate students’ interest in learning languages. And the lure of multimodal discourse analysis theory also comes from the fact that it allows for a relaxing, active and self-independent learning atmosphere where students can improve their learning outcomes and enhance their learning ability. The flexible application of a variety of teaching methods, to a large extent, may compensate for the shortcomings of traditional single-mode teaching method. Multi-modal teaching requires that teachers choose different teaching methods (such as audio-lingual method, communication method, the total physical response method, secret suggestion, direct explanation, situational teaching method, the grammatical translation method, etc) according to the course content, teaching and learning environment, as well as the learning target, and their rational uses are essential for students to understand and grasp the target language knowledge.

Every movie itself can be regarded as a complexity of multimodal language elements, including pictures, actions, sounds, and so on, which, if efficiently used, can be a carrier for a systematical multimodal teaching, and will hence greatly improve English-majoring students’ integrated capacities.

III. TEACHING DESIGN FOR THE COURSE OF MOVIES APPRECIATION WITH MULTIMODAL THEORY

A. *The Teaching Purpose*

We must realize that as long as English Movies Appreciation has been repositioned to be the basic course for English majors, it is required to burden a commission to improve English majors’ language levels in an integrated manner. English language level herein involves listening, pronunciation, translation, writing, oral expression, cultural understanding and together with other aspects, wherein the students’ humanistic qualities are included. It is based on these objectives that this course is expected to be accessible to the realization of functions of different subjects such as English lexicology, pronunciation, English writing, English listening, English grammar, and oral English.

B. *Teaching Contents and Methods*

As mentioned above, all the movies host a diversity of language elements, which can make us utilize them as a carrier to exert more than one teaching method. However, a movie usually occupies 1.5 to 2 hours, sometimes even longer, so if it is showed in class, the time for other class activities will be squeezed out. Therefore, the teachers shall hand out and deliver the movies(with English captions) that are included in the teaching plan at the beginning of this session to students, and ask them to view the movies after class as per the teaching plan. Meanwhile, the teachers should assign some active tasks associated with a certain movie, thus, in class they mainly deal with such teaching contents related to the movie, without the movie showing taking up the class time. It is required that the course of English Movies Appreciation should combine the functions of several language disciplines at one time, and be conducted in a multi-modal form.

1. Combining with English lexical course: Vocabulary learning is vital for English study, and to learn English well, the very essential is to enlarge one’s vocabulary. English linguist Wilskin (1972) said, “Without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed”.(p.111) And British lexicologist Michael McCarthy(1990)

also argued, “No matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully he masters the sounds of a language, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in that language cannot happen in any meaningful way.” (p. 10) Whereas many students have difficulty remembering English words. The viewers without a purpose to learn English language are likely to obtain a meager vocabulary input, many among whom, after having watched a large number of Hollywood movies, poorly end up getting known a few dirty words, such as “fuck”, “son of bitch” and so forth, which are easy to remember just because these words, they think, are funny. But in fact, a movie usually contains abundant popular and commonly-used words and phrases, which are in a higher vitality than those listed in the textbooks, besides, many excellent movies have constructed natural and realistic scenarios, which enable learners to experience the authentic target language environment through auditory and visual senses, thus the effects of their vocabulary input could have been improved. Teachers can employ some snippets and scenes to explain the slangs and words that appear in the film. But it is essential that the teachers guide students to distinguish between the formal and mainstream vocabulary and the informal and improper one, so as to avoid students from falling into the astray, who may improperly focus on non-mainstream vocabulary just due to their curiosity and a pursuit of fashion.

2. Combining with English pronunciation lessons: Words are based on sound, and without a sound, a word can not be used to express anything. So, pronunciation and intonation are essential for us to communicate with others. It is without a doubt that mostly movies are in standard American English pronunciation or British English accent, thus the students can mimic authentic English pronunciation from within the film and acquire varied pronunciation skills, including linking, weak form, elision, blasting sounds, and so on, especially the phonetic transformation rules in a variety of contexts. The flower-selling girl Eliza Doolittle in the movie *My Fair Lady* has a handsome appearance, and she is cute and clever, but when she speaks, her voice and pronunciation turns out to be very vulgar and unpleasant, who, under the instruction of the linguist Professor Henry Higgins, eventually is promoted into the high society because of her acquired polished London accent. Although with the theme of love and romance, this film can be registered as a living pronunciation “textbook” from a linguistic perspective. Meanwhile, many English movies sometimes concern the people from other ethnics, who generally pronounce English words with different regional characteristics, which students shall understand and get familiar with, for it is quite necessary for them to communicate with different groups of people in this pluralist world, they shall be cultivated with the ability to adapt to this situation. For example, in the famous Indian movie *Three Idiots*, there exist many plots where the characters speak English with strong Indian accent, who are typically used to pronouncing “th” into [d], but in fact, they only should be read as [θ] or [ð]. (For instance, they interestingly read the word “thirty” into “dirty”, and “this” into “days” .)

3. Combining with English grammar lesson: Grammar is the study of words and the ways how words work together, which is an invisible force that guides us to put words together into sentences and eventually produce paragraphs and discourses, and how we write and speak has everything to do with the content of our ideas. However, the importance of grammar is often minimized and viewed as tangential in English learning. Though there tend to be dialogues between two or conversation among more characters in the movies, what they say often contain some very important grammatical rules. For example, in the classical movie cast by Smith, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, the hero (Chris Gardner) whose marriage and career has fallen in the dump, still remains strongly-minded and optimistic about life. Living a desperately poor life with his son, he plays hard and eventually becomes a successful businessman. The title of this movie was deliberately spelled “Happyness” instead of “Happiness”, just because the private kindergarten where his son stays is run by a Chinese, who incorrectly spelled “happiness” into “happyness”. In this case, the teachers may present the fact that Chinese students are likely to have similar misspellings, arousing the attention of students on this phenomenon and help students summarize the spelling rules for converting this type of adjectives into nouns. Furthermore, in a Hollywood comedy, *The Proposal*, which features Margaret, we can also induce some grammatical knowledge to students. Margaret has been already a Senior Director working with a publishing company, but she remains an alien without an American Permanent Resident Card. Her intention to stay in United States forces her to make a compelled proposal to a native boy, but after a series of dramatic events, the false proposal ultimately turns to be a real romance and a merry wedding, the story being full of funs. In the movie, Margaret, as a superintendent, is strict with her colleagues, and when she announces to fire one of her subordinates, the latter triggers a fierce confrontation with her, during which, Margaret says: “Listen, I don’t fire you because I envy you.” This sentence can be regarded as a model of prefixed negation and extended to several sentences in the same pattern, letting students understand this syntactic structure well, for instance, “I don’t teach because teaching is easy for me.” and “I don’t miss you because I feel lonely.”

4. Combining with English culture courses: It’s a quite frequent phenomenon that the students have a quite good mastery of grammar and vocabulary, but they cannot communicate with the native speakers successfully when the information is associated with western social culture. Therefore, it is necessary to develop students’ interest towards cultural learning and to cultivate their ability of cultural understanding. Some traditional English movies allow students to learn about Western mainstream culture and historical events. For instance, *Jane Eyre*, *Pride and Prejudice* tell us the histories of Western women’s quests for independence and equality, while the movie *Dance with the Wolves* shows us a powerful and detailed picture about the racial issue for American Indians in the beginning of the founding of the United States. And being dwelled in this era of internationalization, we can frequently experience the cultural conflict and blend among different countries and peoples from movies, such as the movies *The Treatment* and *Lost in Translation*.

Before asking students to watch the movie *The Treatment*, the teacher may require that the students discuss several questions in group to find the differences between western cultures and eastern cultures, with the specific aspects including medicine, family education, friendship, and marriage, after which, each group will present their discussion results in class, and their analyses are required to be in-depth and in place, relating to the pieces in the movie.

5. Combining with English listening course: Although the significance of listening in English learning has been widely recognized, the traditional listening teaching in China's class is not encouraging, where the teachers always let the students listen to some fragments of listening materials which are not so real to life, and then, ask them to finish some questions about what they have heard, followed by the teachers' explanations to the answers together with the listening materials (generally in the mother tongue). This mode of English listening teaching is quite dull and far from satisfying. For effective listening teaching, we should offer natural materials that are closely linked to the daily life and that students are interested in. The materials coming from movie are far more real than those single audio ones, because we exchange information and communicate with others mostly when we are facing each other, and under this circumstance, the counterparts' facial expressions and body language can assist us of our understanding to the parts that we may have not caught. And these visual listening teaching materials can help reduce students' anxiety in listening class. The teachers may give assignments to students for repeating and reciting some pieces of the monologues or dialogues of the characters in the movies after they have watched the movie clip without captions first. Movies, like *Finding Nemo*, *Dead Poets Society*, and *The Devil Wears Prada*, must be the best choices, for they contain affluent contents of verbal language.

6. Combining with English writing course: In a traditional Movies Appreciation class, the teachers just require the students to write some essays about the movies that they have seen, explaining the theme of the movie or analyzing the personalities of the characters, especially the protagonists. But, we shall realize that writing movie reviews should not be the sole writing assignment for movies appreciation course, conversely, there should be more rich and versatile tasks assigned to them, such as abbreviating, rewriting or continuing the movie story. Or they may be given the tasks to compose some detailed descriptions about a scenario, or about a character, including the descriptions of his or her appearance, movements, and emotions, and so on. Besides, after the movie was over, the teacher may ask students to simulate and memorize the classic lines within the movie, or the teacher may help the students analyze the usages of various rhetorical devices, such as simile, antithesis and parallelism, and the students may be asked to write sentences accordingly. For example, there are sentences in the movie *Forrest Gump*: "Mama always said life was like a box of chocolate. You never know that you're gonna get." These sentences involve the figure speech of simile, being meaningful in life philosophy and sophisticated in expressing technique, for which the teacher may let students deeply ponder these sentences, sensing out the meanings within it, and then ask them to simulate them. And further the class shall be organized to give remarks to the sentences that they have composed.

7. Combining with oral English: Nowadays, oral English classes, namely, the lessons of English speaking are actually the monologues of the foreign teachers, who dominate the class, giving little chances to the students to practice their oral English. And what the teachers talk about are the frequently-repeated shallow topics, such as greetings, transportation, weather, food, clothes, etc., which are conducted in a classroom, being isolated from authentic circumstances. This method, for sure, results in low input for students' speaking capacity. In a multimodal Movies Appreciation class, a teacher may ask students to remember the classical dialogues, and allow them to imitate some scenarios, for which, the expressing tension and expression capability are highly demanded, and in that way, the students have the opportunity to experience different tones of voice and body languages when people are in different moods, such as anger, excitement, or mania. *Pride and Prejudice* has a small clip when Elizabeth and Darcy have a quarrel in the rain, both of who speak very formal languages in measured tones and intonation. If students are trained on these, they can fully sense the passion brought by learning English, and their abilities in verbal and body expression are bound to enjoy a great improvement.

8. Combining with translation course: Movies are valuable for English translation teaching. As discussed above, the sentences from a movie are related to a certain situation context, maybe in modern or ancient times, or in a comedy or tragedy, which requires different translation products. It is necessary for students to have a try for translating the excellent sentences in the movies which contain great language and cultural values, following which their translations could be compared to find the best ones. Like the classical movie *First Blood*, the hero Rambo (played by Sylvester Stallone) uttered some good sentences: "The town you dominate, in the mountains I King." And, "No value, valuable death." These sentences can reflect, extremely well, the unrelenting and toughness of the strong man, Rambo. Of course, students can be guided to have a good grasp of the theme of the movie before they have perfect translations for the sentences that can reflect the meaning of the source language as well as the characters best and that have the best aesthetic effect.

C. Films Selection

Of course, for multi-modal teaching the selection of the films is very critical. To begin with, we should consider whether the movie's thought is in a reasonable depth, whether its contents are healthy without an excessive exposure to sex or violence, and whether it has an artistic level. What's more, a possibly large variety of movies should be chosen according to their birth and type, so that students are provided with the chances to have an objective and scientific understanding about English movies, to get a systematic theoretical knowledge of movies, and get an enough familiarity

with western social and cultural background. (Chen Hong, Dong Weiwei, 2009). Secondly, we should follow the step from easy to difficult, from shallow to deep as per their languages and involved topics. In the early stage, some cartoon movies, such as *Hua Mulan* and *The Lion King* can be used, and then in the medium-term, some life movies can be arranged, such as *Roman Holidays* and *The Terminal*, which are easy to the viewers; For the final stage, we can select some difficult ones, such as those which involve a significant history event or professional knowledge, for instance, *Hamlet*, and *Schindler's List*. The third and particularly important point is that the film available to students must have been officially published, with formal English captions. But Chinese captioning must not be provided (to avoid students from simply reading the Chinese captions). What's worse, the pirated copies of DVDs just downloaded from the internet are often accompanied with the wrong English captions, and they are poorly translated into Chinese by some non-professional groups of armature translators, which are likely to mislead the students.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

All in all, English movie appreciation must be a comprehensive course that integrates many linguistic aspects, such as lexical knowledge, pragmatic knowledge and culture knowledge, for which we shall explore to the greatest extent the gigantic functions borne by this carrier, fully making use of the multimodal language elements, for instance, pictures, animation, voice and the like. With a reset of the status of the course English movie appreciation, a teaching strategy of multimodality shall be carried out, in a combination with various language courses such as English pronunciation, and English speaking, listening, English writing, and culture, thus the teaching effect of the course Movies Appreciate can be hopefully improved, and more pleasingly, students' interest in learning English will be upgraded into a higher level. Multimodal discourse, as a new emerging teaching method, is bound to bring the new life for language teaching, which is in a complete compliance with our study rules and principles, exerting an irreplaceable effect on our language teaching. It is believed that, the combination of more teaching approaches and methods, with more information channels and the stimulation from more senses, will become the mainstream trend of future Chinese language teaching development.

REFERENCES

- [1] Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. (1988). *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- [2] Chen Hong, Dong Weiwei. (2009). The Setting and Practice of the Course of Appreciation of English Movies in Higher Vocational Education Curriculum. *Movie Literature*: 153-154.
- [3] Guan Jingjun. (2012). Practice Research on Melting of English Movies in College English Teaching. *Movie Literature*: 168-169.
- [4] Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge.
- He Qingmei. (2012). Discussion on the Application of Task-based Teaching Method in Movies Appreciation Courses, *Journal of Educational Institute of Jilin Province*: 78-79.
- [5] Liang Yan. (2012). On Multivariate Analysis Model of College English Movies Appreciation Course, *Movie Literature*: 163-164.
- [6] Tang Liqin. (2009). Appreciation of American Movies, *Movie Literature*: 154-155.
- [7] Wilkins, D. A. (1972). *Linguistics in Language Teaching*. London: Edward Arnold.

Pingli Lei was born in Anlu, Hubei province of China, who received her master degree from Sun Yat-sen University, China in 2009.

She is currently a lecturer in the School of Foreign Languages, Guangdong Baiyun University in China. Her study interests focus on discourse analysis and teaching methods.