

USING AUTHENTIC VIDEOS IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING IN CHINA

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Date: 5/15/2018

USING AUTHENTIC VIDEOS IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING IN CHINA

A Seminar Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirement for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

English Education

By

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2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere and profound appreciation to all the people who have helped me throughout this seminar paper writing process. Without their meticulous care and support, I would not complete my research.

First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt and deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Kara Candito, a respectable and responsible scholar, who taught me how to make research and how to write seminar paper step by step. She closely read the paper draft again and again and gave me the most valuable comments and advice.

My sincere and warmest gratitude to all the Interlibrary Loan Staff in University of Wisconsin-Platteville. With their help, I got many important articles which supplied a large amount of vital related information for me.

At last, I would like to thank my families who gave me continuous care, strong support and sincere encouragement in the process of study.

Abstract

USING AUTHENTIC VIDEOS IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING IN CHINA

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With massive information about the social and cultural background of English speaking countries, authentic video not only provides teachers and students with real language input, but also cultivates students' cultural awareness and critical thinking. This paper aims to analyze whether Chinese teachers can apply authentic video into their teaching from its definition, advantages and selection as well as SLA theories supporting the use of authentic video. To make a real and substantial research, this paper also examines Chinese college students' and teachers' attitude toward authentic video, explores effective teaching strategies related to authentic video and concludes that it is effective and beneficial to use authentic video in Chinese college EFL teaching. Although all the analyses prove authentic video is good teaching material, it is not widely used by Chinese college teachers. Therefore, this paper finally explores difficulties of using authentic video in Chinese EFL teaching and aims to supply information for future research.

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Chapter I Introduction

College English language teaching in China is still exam-oriented and lingering in the traditional grammar-translation stage. In this teaching model, students are passive learners in class. Most students can only apply English in examination rather than communicate with others. This is the phenomenon of ‘deaf and dumb English’, which gradually frustrates students’ learning interest and causes students’ negative attitude to English learning. Most students think they cannot learn English well because of their low speaking and listening proficiency.

In 2004, China’s Ministry of Education announced the publication and distributed the College English Curriculum Requirements (for trial implementation) (Gao, 2013, p.47), in which the focus of college English teaching was changed into the training of listening and speaking ability from the previous reading comprehension. After the implementation of this reform, Chinese college English teachers realize the importance of listening and speaking, namely, communicative competence. Therefore, they try and find different teaching strategies and materials to change their traditional teaching model.

In fact, regarding this scenario, many English teachers and scholars have proposed to use authentic videos to motivate and help students to improve their English proficiency. “Authentic video material designed for its entertainment value rather than language teaching is a rich and exciting source of video software for instruction in English as a second language (ESL)” (Stempleski, 1987, p.1). Authentic video motivates students with its vivid and interesting component and relaxing learning atmosphere, which encourage students’ interaction and participation. Most importantly, compared to printed coursebook, authentic video provides “real language” and “an authentic look at the culture” (Stempleski, 1990, p.9) and intertwines English-language culture and linguistic knowledge, such as, “accents, vocabulary, grammar and syntax,

and all kinds of discourse” (Sherman, 2003, p. 2). Therefore, this paper aims to analyze whether Chinese college English teachers could use English authentic videos to improve students’ English proficiency, explore how EFL teachers use authentic videos effectively in practical teaching and find out potential problems concerned with the application of authentic video in practical college English teaching in China.

Statement of the Problem

This paper explores the following four research questions: 1. What does authentic video refer to? 2. Could Chinese college English teachers use English authentic videos to improve students’ English proficiency? 3. How do EFL teachers use authentic videos effectively in practical teaching? 4. What are potential problems concerned with the application of authentic video in practical college English teaching in China?

Definition of Terms

Authentic video: refers to video designed for entertainment value instead of language teaching (Stempleski, 1987, p.3) and commonly and even daily used among English-speaking people in English-speaking countries. There are many types of authentic videos, such as, feature films, drama series, sitcoms, soap operas, drama clips, comedy sketches, documentaries and educational films, TV news and weather, interviews and talk shows, sports programmes, game shows, non-fiction clips, TV commercials, etc. (Sherman, 2003)

College English: refers to English for non-English majors in China.

College English teachers: refer to teachers who teach college English to non-English majors in China.

College students: refer to college English learners who are non-English majors in China.

EFL: is an abbreviation for “English as a Foreign Language”.

ESL: is an abbreviation for “English as a Second Language”.

SLA: is an abbreviation for “Second Language Acquisition”.

Purpose of the Study

Research related to authentic video has indicated that it is effective and interesting to use authentic video materials in English teaching. The purpose of this paper is to analyze whether Chinese college English teachers could use English authentic videos to improve students’ English proficiency, explore how to use authentic video in real teaching and find out potential problems concerned with the application of authentic video in practical college English teaching in China.

Significance of the Study

Chinese EFL teachers and students have been trapped by ‘deaf and dumb English’ for many years. Meanwhile, authentic videos are regarded as good teaching materials because of their natural and authentic language, rich cultural background and attractive visual and audio feeling. The paper will analyze whether Chinese college English teachers could use English authentic videos to improve students’ English proficiency, explore how to use authentic video in real teaching and find out potential problems concerned with the application of authentic video in practical college English teaching in China. By doing so, the paper may help Chinese EFL students find a right and relaxing way to improve their English. At the same time, Chinese EFL teachers will make full use of authentic videos in English language teaching. Simply put, the author hopes the paper can provide Chinese college English teachers and students good ways to teach and learn English effectively and respectively.

Delimitation of the Study

The research will be conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. Primary searches will be conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Baidu Scholar, ResearchGate and CNKI. Key search topics will include “authentic video”, “college English teaching” and “EFL”.

Methodology

A brief review of the literature on the definition of authentic video will be conducted. A second review of the literature on SLA theories supporting the use of authentic video will be performed. A third review of the literature on the advantages of using of authentic videos in college EFL teaching will be carried out. A fourth review of the literature on Chinese college students’ and teachers’ attitude toward authentic video will be executed. Additional research was conducted on selection of authentic videos and effective teaching strategies related to authentic videos. Finally, the paper will conclude difficulties of using of authentic videos in Chinese college English teaching.

Chapter II Review of Literature

This chapter reviews the literature on the definition, advantages and selection of authentic video as well as theories supporting the use of authentic video, analyzes reasons why Chinese college English teachers could use authentic video in their teaching to improve students' English proficiency and explores teaching strategies for the application of authentic videos in EFL teaching.

Definitions of Authentic Video

Clarifying the definitions of authentic video is a primary step to analyze whether it is suitable and effective for Chinese college English teachers to improve students' English proficiency.

Stempleski (1987) has defined authentic video as a kind of material “designed for its entertainment value rather than language teaching” (p.1). This material provides students with real language and authentic culture, stimulates students' internal motivation, helps students comprehend the language and makes students proficiently utilize medium (Stempleski, 1987, p.1). Additionally, Stempleski (1990) has pointed out the language authentic video uses is ungraded in contrast to ESL/EFL video (p. 9). Apparently, ESL/EFL video is used for ESL/EFL language teaching and learning and the target viewers are non-native speakers with different English proficiency. Hence, the language in ESL/EFL video is deliberately adapted, simplified and graded to care for students' different English language proficiency and teachers' different teaching needs. Conversely, the language in authentic videos is natural and ungraded because they are designed for native speakers who have no trouble in understanding the language.

Sherman (2003) has described authentic video as “all the kinds of programme you normally see at the cinema, on TV or on DVD” (p. 1) and has listed the types of authentic video,

for example, “drama video (films, soaps, sitcoms, etc.), documentaries, TV news and weather, discussions, interviews, TV commercials, talk shows, game shows, educational films” (P.6). Evidently, all these programmes lie in native speakers’ daily life and the purpose of these authentic videos are to make their life more convenient, relaxing and colorful.

Liu (2008) has defined authentic video as “a kind of materials which are all real text and designed not for language students, but for the speakers of the language” (p.8). Because authentic video is one kind of authentic materials, it is necessary to figure out what authentic materials are. According to Nunan (1988) and Hedge (2000), authentic materials are natural and uncut and with no purpose for language teaching. Similarly, International TEFL Academy (2017) has suggested that authentic materials are generated by native speakers for non-pedagogical purposes in contrast to course books and other teaching aids designed for EFL students (p. 50). Correspondingly, Huessien (2012) has stated authentic materials are “used in the target culture for actual communicative needs” (p.30). In addition, Morrow (1977) has claimed authentic materials are produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort” (p.13).

Even though the term authentic video has been defined in different ways by different researchers, there is one similarity that authentic video is produced for real communication among native speakers rather than for language teaching.

Reasons of Using Authentic Video in Chinese College English Teaching

There are three reasons why many teachers and scholars think Chinese teachers can use authentic video in English teaching, namely, theories supporting the use of authentic video, attitude Chinese college students and teachers hold toward authentic video, and advantages of authentic video in college EFL teaching.

Theories Supporting the Use of Authentic Video

The Input Hypothesis & The Affective Filter Hypothesis. “Comprehensible input and the strength of the filter are the true cause of second language acquisition.” (Krashen, 1982, P.33). “Comprehensible input” refers to the Input Hypothesis, in which Krashen pointed out only when receiving sufficient comprehensible language materials can learners acquire language and materials which are slightly more difficult than the current level of learners. Additionally, “the strength of the filter” is another Krashen’s hypothesis, namely, the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which analyzes the mechanism of language acquisition and the factors influencing language learning from the perspective of psychology and concludes that the process of second language acquisition is also affected by many emotional factors, such as motivation, personality and anxiety.

English authentic video, which is full of gestures, facial expression, eye contact, body language and is “a window on English-language culture” (Sherman, 2003), heightens students’ learning interest and facilitates students’ comprehensible input with rich visual aids. Meanwhile, the interesting plots and relaxing watching atmosphere lessen students’ anxiety, which makes positive effects on students’ learning. Hence, based on the Input Hypothesis & the Affective Filter Hypothesis, authentic video is good and effective resource for EFL teaching.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Interweaving principles and foundation stones of SLA, Communicative Language Teaching has been recognized globally as the best and basic language teaching approach, which focuses on the social, cultural, and pragmatic features of language as well as the grammatical elements of communication (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 31). According to Brown & Lee (2015), characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching are as following:

- Goals of CLT are all-sided and language techniques of CLT are designed to “engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes” (p.31). In CLT, teachers focus on pragmatic function as well as organization language forms.
- CLT “focus on real-world contexts” (p. 32). The final objective of CLT is to help students use language in real and unrehearsed contexts outside the classroom.
- CLT class is learner-centered instead of teacher- centered (p.32). Teachers in CLT are facilitators and guides who capture students’ interest and design activities to stimulate and improve the interest.

One of the noticeable features of English authentic video is the real language used in real context by native-English speakers for practical purpose. Therefore, the language in authentic video supplies realistic language, setting, culture and function for English learners. In addition, when watching video, especially, films or shows, students are active participants. In the process of watching, students listen to the language, watch the pictures, feel authentic culture and experience the feeling of characters eagerly and initiatively. Meanwhile, authentic video, especially, feature films, can create a realistic setting and bring students into the role, which stimulates students’ motivation and helps them learn English subconsciously. Wang (2014) has stated that “While viewing the video materials, students can put themselves in the vivid atmosphere created by the video materials and understand the pragmatics of the language used by the characters” (p. 25). During the viewing, students can acquire the exact and practical examples of how to use English in real context from native English speakers.

When analyzing above characteristics of CLT and authentic video, the author finds authentic video can be used as good English-language teaching material.

Chinese College Students' and Teachers' Attitude toward Authentic Video. Both Chinese college students and teachers hold positive attitude toward authentic video. First, students had a positive perception of the authentic materials and believe that authentic materials are motivating. Research (Zhao, 2009) has shown that “99.9% of students approved the language and communicative situation displayed by America TV series were authentic and vivid” (p. 25) and they “confirmed the audio-visual effects of America TV series” (p. 26). Equally, Liu (2008) has claimed that authentic video is the best teaching material for learners with its auditory and visual support, compared to the printed materials and audio cassettes (p. 7). Additionally, being rich in topics, authentic video is not only beneficial for teachers to organize and design activities (Chen, 2007), but also attractive for students to keep their attention on language learning (Bo, 2006).

Advantages of Authentic Video in College EFL Teaching. Wang (2009) has pointed out it is effective and interesting to use authentic video materials in English teaching. (p.179). There are some advantages about this teaching approach.

First, authentic video “presents real language” (Stempleski, 1990, p. 9) and construct an English environment for students. The video can provide students with different accents, vocabulary, sentences and culture knowledge which the native speakers use and experience in their daily life (Sherman, 2003). For instance, students can understand festival cultures in English-speaking countries from videos more minutely and profoundly than from textbooks. As Li (2013) has claimed, “Compared with traditional textbooks, dialogues in movies are a panoramic reproduction of the actual means of communication” (p.334).

Second, authentic video, especially films and TV series, can motivate students learning enthusiasm. The result of the study (Maneekul, 2002) has showed that the use of authentic

materials in ESL classrooms positively enhances ESL student's motivation to learn the language. For one thing, captivated by interesting and vivid pictures, students are willing to enjoy English class and actively join in activities, which contrasts with traditional teaching approach. For another thing, the language is up-to-date and interactive (Sherman, 2003), which can make students experience the practical usage of English, be aware of the importance of English learning, and then improve their internal motivation. Subsequently, authentic video, especially movies, "allow learners to translate words into pictures" (Yaseen, 2015, p. 34), which facilitates their comprehension, reduce their anxiety and create the sense of attainment for students.

Third, authentic video heightens students' English proficiency, especially, in listening, speaking, reading, writing and cultural awareness. "Movie watching enhances listening as well as speaking skills" (Yaseen, 2015, p. 34). Different medium has positive effects on students' reading and communicative skills. (Xhemali, 2013). "By providing a more complete context of actions, gestures, and pictures, video can make spoken language more comprehensible, especially to beginning-level students and to students in EFL situations who may have little exposure to the second language outside the classroom" (Arcario, 1990, p.112). Fluit-Dupuy (2012) has applied film in writing class. In addition, watching video creates information gap between students and cultivates students' critical thinking, since different students get different information and comprehend the video differently (Liu, 2008, p. 12). For instance, when analyzing characters in video, different students hold their own opinions. After all, there are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes. What is more, when approaching the culture of English-speaking countries, students are subconsciously feel the cultural difference or shock between different countries, which enhances their critical thinking (Yaseen, 2015, p. 34).

Fourth, authentic video makes students' auditory, vision and memory systems work simultaneously, which deepens their understanding of the language and culture, and form a long memory. In addition, "watching movies enhances information retention and makes it easier for retrieving them" (Yaseen, 2015, p. 34). With the stimulation of sight, hearing, feeling and real plot and context, it is easy for students to keep a long memory. Furthermore, these pictures and sounds in video can activate the brain to extract the language that has preserved, when students face the similar situation.

Finally, authentic video is "good for teaching" (Yang, 2011, p.43). For one thing, authentic video enriches classroom activities. For another thing, teachers use authentic video to cultivate students' self-learning ability. Students can learn English through authentic videos whenever and wherever with cell phones or computers.

Using Authentic Video in Practical Teaching

When using authentic video in practical teaching, college EFL teachers must face two problems, namely, what kinds of authentic video they should choose and how they can use authentic video in real teaching. Therefore, the following parts will focus on the solutions of these two problems.

Selection of Authentic Video. First, when selecting videos, teachers should take students into consideration first. Students' interest is the primary consideration. (Arcario, 1990, p.118). Teachers should make a survey on students' interest and choose videos based on the survey result. Then, the content of video must be healthy and suitable for college students, that is, teachers should avoid authentic videos with violence and adult content (Wang, 2014). Next, students' English proficiency should be taken into consideration, in a sense that students can follow the speed, understand the vocabulary and imitate the pronunciation and intonation of the

speaker without too much difficulty (Wang, 2014; Arcario, 1990; Yaseen, 2015). “Video materials that are far higher or lower than their English proficiency will not hold students’ attention” (Wang, 2014, p. 26), namely, unmatched language level between the video and students will lessen students’ learning attention and achievement. Therefore, when selecting authentic videos, the teachers should choose the topics that students are interested in, pay attention to that the language in authentic video is slightly difficult than students’ language proficiency, remember that the video can amply demonstrate culture background and arouse students’ cultural comparison. It is just like what Bajrami & Ismaili (2016) has pointed out, that is, the topic of video materials “must be chosen based on students’ interest and their level of English proficiency, as well as cultural aspects” (p. 505).

Second, the quality of authentic video should be guaranteed. “It is important to choose scenes that balance dialogue with a high degree of visual support, appropriate speech delivery, clear picture and sound, and standard accent” (Arcario, 1990, p. 109). Clear visual pictures, distinct aural voice and moderate speed can have positive effect on students’ language learning. According to Lu (2009), it is a good choice to choose recent award-winning films because the language is well polished, and the content is up-to-date. Clear authentic video can heighten students’ comprehension and strengthen students’ confidence in English.

Third, it is better to choose up-to-date and student-related videos than others. For one thing, these videos can provide fresh vocabulary for communication and overcome the outdated features of textbook articles. For another thing, videos closely related to students’ practical life can satisfy practicability of the real life.

Finally, teachers should select videos with suitable length according to the course objectives or activities (Huessien, 2012). “Using relatively short sequences often entails

excerpting scenes from films, television dramas, and documentaries that can be used independently” (Arcario, 1990, p. 119). Teachers can edit the whole video into short clips and combine one or two short clips with relative activities to excite students’ learning interest and avoid watching videos for a whole class.

In contrast to many researchers, International TEFL Academy (2017) has come up with visuals to be avoided in ESL/EFL classroom. When choosing videos, the teachers should cast off video with “violent scenes”, “crowded or cluttered images and those with many distracters”, “images that are too small and not clearly defined”, “stereotyped images”, “poor reproduction”, “images unrelated to lesson” and “poorly scaled illustrations”. (p.236)

Teaching Strategies in Practical Teaching. Researchers and teachers has proposed many effective strategies used in practical teaching. There are many similarities among these activities and strategies. Next, the author will review these strategies according to the order: pre-viewing strategies, while-viewing strategies and after-viewing strategies.

Pre-viewing Strategies. A good preparation is essential for a successful class. First, teachers should set up clear goals and objectives for their teaching with video materials (Wang, 2014; Bajrami & Ismaili, 2016). Apparently, the fundamental, intermediate and advanced goals are to heighten EFL learners’ listening and speaking skills, cultivate students’ competence of intercultural communications and improve students’ aesthetic values respectively (Wang, 2014). Second, teachers should write complete and detailed teaching plan, which contains the instructions of group division, teaching procedures, activity directions and preparations students should make. Additionally, cultural background introduction should be introduced to students before watching the video. Third, there are activities in pre-viewing process, such as, evoking what students has known about the topic by pictures, silent watching for a short clip or guessing

the meaning of the title (International TEFL Academy, 2017, p.235). By the way, Stempleski (1990) has proposed options for presenting the video include “showing only the pictures”, “playing only the soundtrack”, “showing the pictures to some of the students and letting others hear the soundtrack”, “playing the pictures and sound together”, “playing only the beginning of a video sequence” and “playing any part of a sequence if necessary” (p. 13).

While-viewing Strategies. Researchers have provided many effective strategies and activities in the process of while-viewing. Teachers can use short extracts for cultivating students’ linguistic competence as well as just expose students to the authentic video just for entertainment and relaxing (Sherman, 2003, p.6). For linguistic competence, taking note or answering general comprehension questions can be used when students watching the segment (International TEFL Academy, 2017, p. 235). Similarly, dictation and imitation can be used to improve students’ listening, speaking and writing ability as well as enlarge their lexical resources (Yang, 2011, p. 38).

After-viewing Strategies. Role-play, film review, debate, vocabulary matching, character description, discussion, culture comparison are fruitful strategies which can practice students’ linguistic competence, cultivate their cultural awareness and enhance their critical thinking ability (Yang, 2011, p. 38). Additionally, Sherman (2003) has proposed one strategy, “Picture it” (p.210), to supply opportunities for students to discuss stereotypes and compare their expectations with reality.

Summary

With massive information about the social and cultural background of English speaking countries, authentic video not only provides teachers and students with real language input, but also cultivate students’ cultural awareness and critical thinking. Facing this wonderful learning

and teaching material, the author analyzes whether Chinese teachers can apply it into their teaching from its definition, advantages and selections as well as theories supporting the use of authentic video. To make a real and substantial research, the author also examines Chinese college students' and teachers' attitude toward authentic video and explores effective teaching strategies related to authentic video.

Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations

The above chapter has analyzed whether it is beneficial and effective to use authentic video in Chinese college EFL teaching and how to make the most of authentic video. Although, most researches have showed authentic video is good teaching material for EFL teaching and given multitudinous teaching strategies related to using authentic video in practice teaching, authentic video is still not widely used in Chinese college EFL teaching. Therefore, the author will explore the main potential problems Chinese EFL teachers may encounter with the hope of that future researchers can find better solutions for these difficulties.

Difficulties of Using Authentic Video in Chinese EFL Teaching

In terms of using authentic video for EFL teaching, Chinese teachers do face difficulties. (Yang, 2011, p. 53).

In the first, preparations for using authentic video in teaching takes teachers a lot of time (Tang, 2006) and need the support of the labor and money. Although there are clear video selection criteria, it still takes teachers plenty of time and money to select authentic videos suitable for EFL college students, because the language in these videos is natural, ungraded and without simplification, which is difficult for teachers to match the language level with students' proficiency. After all, "the films and the TV series produced in English speaking countries are foreign and culturally specific" (Yang, 2011, p. 54). Moreover, with increasingly emphasis on the international protection of intellectual property, EFL teachers do not always have free access to authentic videos.

In the second, many English teachers are not prepared well for using authentic video in EFL teaching. Being less exposed to the target language and culture, teachers are unconfident in their listening and speaking ability and especially cultural comprehension. Hence, they prefer

traditional teaching methods to using authentic video in real teaching. Additionally, nonproficiency in multimedia technology and internet hinders teachers to move further in applying authentic video in teaching.

Finally, some academic administration in college and university has definite direction that EFL teachers should not play videos in class, because they think the teachers playing video in class are halfhearted in teaching or they do not prepare the specific teaching well.

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