ON TEACHING SPOKEN ENGLISH THROUGH AUTHENTIC FILMS

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The aim of the present paper is to show the peculiarities of spoken English and suggest ways to teach communicative English through authentic films. The paper examines different peculiarities of spoken English. It focuses also on teaching communicative grammar in the professional course of English. It emphasizes the peculiarities of phatic communication which should be surely taken into consideration in the process of teaching oral speech. From this point of view, it is important to focus on the ways English people express their emotions as it helps the language learners to understand more clearly the meaning of certain conversations. The paper emphasizes also the peculiarities of teaching communicative grammar through authentic films which is considered at the level of emotional discourse. Backchannel signals are analyzed in real conversations that include nonverbal backchannel signals as well.

Keywords: Communicative grammar, Emotional discourse, Phatic communication, Backchannel signals, Phatic communication.

Introduction

Nowadays the role of technical aids in the teaching-learning process is becoming more and more important. In spite of the great effectiveness of using authentic films in the teaching-learning process, their importance is not justified in the teaching syllabus. They are chosen randomly without taking into consideration students’ language awareness, interests and age peculiarities. While planning the professional course of English, lecturers do not pay enough attention to students’ cognitive, professional, aesthetic and other needs, as well as to the topic of films, their linguistic, pragmatic characteristics, which are very important in achieving their goals. Film selection and teaching of any aspect of English is done without a properly worked out methodological system. As to other procedures aimed at mastering grammatical, phonetic or linguistic material of the film, they are important particularly for the development of communicative competence.

The Effectiveness of Developing Communicative Competence through Authentic Films

Feature films are mostly aimed at mastering the given language more quickly and effectively, assimilating its verbal and non-verbal communicative means. The teaching process through authentic films has first of all a pragmatic direction, as while learning the language we assimilate both sociolinguistic and cultural phenomena. Native speakers assimilate sociolinguistic knowledge in natural conditions, while it is a great
problem for language learners, and in this context authentic films help us to fill the gap and show us the language in action, help us reveal cultural peculiarities and take part in real communication. Authentic films possess a great deal of sociocultural and sociolinguistic phenomena, but passive watching will not give the desired result. It should be mentioned that both students and lecturers have serious problems in understanding those films in which actors use slang and different idiomatic expressions, or when they have to deal with humor, emotions etc. Thus the usage of authentic films for teaching purposes helps language learners to reveal and overcome mistakes of cultural and pragmatic character.

Teaching English colloquial vocabulary through authentic films is firstly motivated by the fact that films represent various authentic speech acts. Moreover, we can come across such every day, colloquial expressions in films that are rarely met even in modern publications of English-speaking countries.

As we know Armenian students get some kind of knowledge on jargon, slang during their theoretical and practical English courses, but their contextual meaning and usage is not sufficient. Following the traditional pedagogical methods, many instructors avoid teaching various conversational expressions such as curse, exhortation, blasphemy and others. Foreign language instructors are more tend to teach verbal expressions of conduct, different types of phrases and patterns. However, students’ background knowledge cannot be enriched with these lexical units.

While teaching the spoken English vocabulary one should take into account not only the features of informative communication, but also those of non-informative. As we know, the communication consists of not only informative, but also phatic communicative acts. According to Klyuev, phatic communicative act is the non-referential use of language to share feelings or establish a mood of sociability rather than to communicate information or ideas; ritualized formulas intended to attract the attention of the listener or prolong communication. (E. В. Клюев, 2002):

It is evident that people can communicate with one another without transmitting any kind of information. There are also cases when information is transmitted without direct contact. In this respect movies are the best way to confirm the foregoing. One of the values of feature films is the skill and artistry of representing phatic communicative acts. This particularly refers to recently shot films in which modern English developments are better revealed. That refers to both verbal and nonverbal communication. Authentic-fiction films contain numerous non-verbal or phatic communicative acts which can be met in the dialogues or monologues of native speakers. According to Eylott, every society possesses a certain phatic or non-verbal communicative strategy that can be of cooperative and non-cooperative nature (E. A. Эйлott, 2004).

On the phonetic level English colloquial speech mainly deviates from the standard pronunciation rules. Spoken language is rich in a variety of stylistic devices.

In order to identify the characteristics of phatic communicative acts we should remember that the most important features of colloquial vocabulary are repetitions, imported items, parasite words (well, yeah, come on, you see), as well as overemotional characteristics. According to Shakhovsky, one of the main characteristics of spoken language is the tendency to express the mind emotionally (В. И. Шаховский, 2008).

An important trend is the fact that overemotional characteristics of the English language is not expressed through linguistic means of normative grammar. That does not mean that knowledge of normative grammar may cause problems in understanding the film plot. However the spoken vocabulary dominates in films, which may easily hinder the process of understanding film content. Thus we can state that original movies can substitute the absence of natural language environment and be an effective tool of learning the language.

Teaching of English colloquial speech has always presented great difficulty without direct communication with native speakers. Taking into account this fact the scientists give preference to audiovisual resources, particularly to applying authentic films for training purposes.

From the perspective of phatic communication the following markers should be distinguished: markers of starting a communication, backchannel signals and communication completion. It is obvious that it is almost impossible to master the spoken language without the correct and appropriate use of
markers typical of everyday conversational style. People may greet each other, make compliments without reporting the crucial information before starting the negotiations, disputes or flirting. So communication integration markers include the following types:

- Verbal clichés of conduct
- Attention attracting markers
- Contact establishing markers.

E. M. Lazutkina has clearly analyzed the functions of different verbal markers in various speech acts. He states that verbal clichés of conduct refer to simple or everyday markers of phatic communicative strategy. They make it possible to start the communication, highlight the outcome and finish the communicative act.

It seems to some educators that there is no need to teach the attention attracting markers as it is easy to distinguish them. However, experience shows that foreign language students are not quick in distinguishing them, even when someone addresses them like "Hey, Jack!". We may state that various forms of imperative are not perceived easily. Due to peculiarities of native language Armenian students have difficulties in perceiving ways of addressing to someone or commanding something.

As it has already been mentioned, the British people apply various strategies to capture the speakers’ attention.

In order to assimilate the emotional background of films special attention should be paid to the backchannel signals. Among them we can single out the markers of gratitude, request, invitation, wishes and replicas of condolence. Backchannel signals help to clarify the speech participants’ level of readiness to communicate. Eye contact, head nods, smiles and body alignments all help to tell us whether or not the recipient has answered our summons and is attending to our message. During conversations, even when it is not our turn at talk, we may nod or make noises like “umhmm”, ‘‘uhhuh’’, ‘‘yeh’’, ‘‘yerright’’ – signals that encourages the speaker to continue.

The process of learning English colloquial vocabulary through authentic films can be more effective if students study non-verbal markers of reverse connection before watching the movie. The same refers to the markers of starting or finishing the communication. It is clear that authentic films are rich in such expressions and they cannot be easily taught through textbooks. We can state that cultural differences in nonverbal feedback causes stress while watching film. So we should be ready to interpret the signals to our students while watching.

Students at the faculty of foreign languages should be able to start and finish the communication on time using different strategies such as cooperative and non-cooperative. The latter includes the markers of opposition, disagreement and so on.

For example: "I’m not going to hear it any longer. I’ve got other things to do.” (T.Strong):

As it is mentioned above authentic films are rich in colloquial expressions which refer both to grammar and vocabulary. English colloquial speech is more simple and economical at both grammatical and lexical levels. At grammatical level mainly auxiliary verbs are omitted, not only in responds but in interrogative constructions as well.

For example: And your name? And your address? A tourist? On Business? Now, the room... Double or single? Number seven. First floor, please. Here’s the key and your room location. Thank you.

Here are some other examples of communicative grammar taken from the film “Overboard”:

- Sound breaks (erm), which express hesitation: And I I get really erm – you know when when I’m trying to cook.
- Repetitions: When when, they’d they’d they’d, you you.
- False start when the speaker can’t start his speech or his speech is interrupted for some reason, or the case when he mixes one grammatical structure with another: I mean you know what getting up Sunday’s like anyway and – I’d – I was behind in any case.
• And I get really – you know when I’m trying to cook – and people come and chat I get terribly put off.
• Various discourse markers or fixed phrases (you know, you see, I mean, kind of, sort of, like, well, now) that are used in speech to show that the involvement in a certain discourse creating activity.
• Short forms like negation (didn’t) and verbal forms (I’m, I’d, they’ve) and cos – because (Overboard).

Such examples are frequently met in authentic films and are easily perceived or interpreted as the sequence of different situations and visual context help to guess the meaning.

Movie watching should be accompanied by various tasks. We can first introduce the appropriate grammatical phenomenon and then ask students to find the relevant examples in the movie.

The important fact is that the communicative grammatical structures and patterns are revealed at the emotional, informational discourse level. In this case, the whole film is seen as a certain discourse, which means that the linguistic patterns are studied at the discourse level and not through particular expressions. Moreover, the discourse level is pushed to the foreground. At this level it is possible to teach communicative grammar and use the given grammatical structure in different situations. For many years students at the faculty of foreign languages study the same grammatical patterns at different levels. As it is proved the implementation of authentic films to teach grammar makes the learning process interesting and effective (Leech G., Svartvik J, 2002).

We are used to teaching culture mainly through fiction, but nowadays the use of any kind of authentic materials such as audio and video materials is encouraged as modern English developments are better reflected in them.

The important principle of teaching communicative grammar is that students learn grammatical structures for a better understanding of spoken English, and movie watching should serve for this purpose. While watching they try to identify and write down the grammatical structures and then explain their functions. It is important to highlight the primary goal of the course: i.e. whether it is aimed at developing writing or speaking skills.

Conclusion

Authentic films give us an opportunity to assimilate phatic communicative acts and pragmatic markers. There is no doubt that the assimilation of phatic markers needs additional application of various reading, listening, translation tasks and implementation of various strategies. Authentic films are useful for the development of both oral and written speech. Films help us to perceive and assimilate phatic communicative acts at the lexicological, phonetic and grammatical levels. The choice of tasks and films should be done according to the aspect of the language taught. The instruction of English colloquial speech cannot be done without the assimilation of the simplest elements of phatic communication as it is carried out not only by verbal but also by non-verbal means. Grammatical structures act as a sign system, and if at the expression level only verbal means of communication are emphasized, then at the discourse level both verbal and non-verbal communicative means are observed. The important fact is that grammatical structures are revealed at the discourse level and the film is seen as a certain discourse.

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