Movie Reviewing - A Prospective Incidental Learning Approach in English Language Acquisition

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Abstract

In applied linguistics, the practice of incidental learning i.e., learning without conscious purpose of committing the learning instructions to memory, is broadly recommended for effective Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Besides, the advent and applications of new technologies provide immense opportunities to promote and endorse incidental learning in L2 classrooms. In recent interdisciplinary respects, the integration of media studies in tertiary level English language learning curricula is reckoned to be a sensible interdisciplinary approach with potential outcomes. And, observing the long-term consumption of media, it is also quite perceptible that Indian consumerism to cinema and its offshoots is naturally on the rise. With this understanding, this research article explores the areas for English language skills development taking into account of the perks of incidental learning particularly through learners' regular experience with movie reviews.

Keywords: incidental learning, movie reviews, English language teaching, second language acquisition

1. Introduction

"Learning always takes place in an environment, the idea of carefully designing instruction, varying the formats in which information is presented to students, and building interactive simulations lead naturally to the idea of constructing entire learning environments" (Wan, Tanimoto & Templeton, 2008). "A significant portion of consumed media products is occupied by cinema" (Kubrak, 2020). Movies occupy a vast space in the lives of ordinary people. Their progression from being a medium of mere entertainment or an experiential product to infotainment and beyond is not very inconspicuous in academic environment.

Movie is a paramount learning medium for supplying accurate speech and conversations to the learners of a language because it involves everyday language of the people. "Movies are not only linguistically educational, but they can also be culturally educational" (Sofi, 2015). From a learner's behavioral perspective, it is obvious that movies naturally stimulate creation of beliefs, impact views of life and correct attitudes in multiple spheres. Consequently, for all these reasons, a learner of a second language could easily fall into the prominent role of a consumer of this distinctive art form and also can look at films as means of learning tools.

1.1 Movies as Commodity and Culture of Youth

It is difficult to overstate the point that most of the youngsters have been great consumers of films. Consequently, movies are some of the basic commodities to which an average Indian is largely exposed to. According to the 2016 Deloitte report on Indian Film Industry:

"India has around 500 million unique mobile users which is likely to become 1.3 billion by 2020. Currently, around 200 million have access to internet and this number is set to increase with the introduction of 4G services. The proliferation of internet and smart phone usage has opened up a new platform for film distribution and viewing."

Needless to say that the Indian youth population, being the major segment of smartphone ownership, by and large, watches movies using smart devices. And by the influence of visual media, youngsters prefer watching the movie

reviews in giant online platforms such as *YouTube*. This technical boon apart, they watch movies on big screens in theatres. From social perspectives, the power of movies as a socialisation tool effects a variety of opinions connected with youth's trendy lifestyles. The resultant lifestyle definitely encompasses the aspect of English language.

1.1.1 Movies as Cultural Resources

Movies are identified as some of the major exhibitors of a place's cultural heritage for the reason that they widely propagate and speak of the culture in which the narratives are set up. Movies are the manifestations of society and they deliberately or inadvertently work to change or replicate the prevailing conditions of the society. Cinemas persistently deal with the issues of the society and draw out the darkest secrets of the world. Istiak Mahmood (2013) in his study on the influence of cinema on the lifestyle of university students of Bangladesh concludes: "cinemas are undeniably reflective of the society that we live in, the strong link between "reel" and "real" is here to stay and cinema influenced our lifestyle vice versa as well." The language used in the movies alone can clearly communicate the mood and hint about the nature of the characters.

2. Movies for Incidental Language Learning

Long term exposure on media has profited the learners' foreign language skills (Kuppens, 2010). Bell and Collins (2009) are of the opinion that second language development is not much contributed by grammar based activities. India is not an English-speaking country completely in itself and its cultural background, miscellaneous linguistic ideologies and educational philosophies are moderately different from the English-speaking nations. Native speakers acquire 70% of their mother tongue incidentally as they meet by chance new words in the writing and speaking of others (Read, 2000). It implies that learning second language is more feasible in incidental learning methods than in explicit traditional instructional techniques. For incidental language learning, linguists firmly suggest many practices such as, watching movies, making field visits, doing extensive reading or role playing.

At tertiary level Indian L2 classrooms, it is often noticeable that students arriving from vernacular medium background have limited scope with their insufficient vocabulary, bad grammar, pronunciation and comprehension, incoherent writing style, and poor listening. Generally, movies speak the language of the people or vice versa. Movies generate a great deal of passion for learning that can be matched only by the Internet. And assignments based on movies reveal a superior form of application than assignments based on more conventional textbooks. Movies make students speak regardless of apprehension and hesitation that hold them back. The most apathetic and most nervous students often discover their voices in their immediate desire to articulate their views and feelings about a movie they like (Stewart, 2006). Therefore, it validates the statement that incidental learning can be greatly promoted using films as core materials.

2.1 Movie Reviews as Potential Tools for All-inclusive Linguistic Enhancement

As aforementioned, Indian youth enjoy a fair amount of knowledge on movies and are significantly exposed to movie reviews. Though movies are in visual form, reviews are their linguistic elements as they are being delivered in both written and spoken form. And when they are accessed, they call for reading and listening. As a result, the movie reviews can be applied in all the major areas of language skill development.

The selection of movies for the review can be done at ease when it is left to the decision of the students because they will find it comfortable to give their reviews for the type of movies that they regularly watch. Moreover, some students might find it difficult to review the films that are made in foreign language because the projection of the film and the cultural know-how involved in it might seem alien and appallingly new to them.

2.2 Conventional Structure of Movie Review

Typically, a movie review consists of the following components:

2.2.1 Introduction

It conveys facts and background information about the movie, such as, title, cast, name of the artists or actors and actresses, director, producer, music director, playback singers, editor, cinematographer and other technical and non-technical crew.

2.2.2 Main Discussion

This part entails essential information about the following:

- genre of movie
- setting where the main plot takes place
- acting
- music
- photography

- costumes
- special effects
- colour / animation

2.2.3 Conclusion

It necessarily delivers judgement, rating, recommendation and reasons why you should watch or avoid the movie.

2.3 Descriptive Reviews as Consumers

Though reviews from professional critics can be taken up as a model for the descriptive writing and speaking activities, the aspect of technical description need not be insisted much when the learners emulate the description. Ultimately, the proposition encompassed in this exercise is to encourage and promote incidental learning. Hence, in the review, the mastery in evaluating the technical aspects involved in the movies can be sidelined.

The study titled "The Influence of Movie Reviews on Consumers" conducted by Jacob R. Pentheny at University of New Hampshire in 2015 draws the following as one of its conclusions:

"…people with a high Need for Cognitive Closure prefer reviews written by consumers. This means that they trust consumer reviews to give them more accurate information than critics. This could be because they see consumers more similar to themselves, in terms of taste and knowledge. They may feel that critics write longer and more complex reviews that are too inconvenient to read."

Moreover, the assessor being a language teacher, it becomes convenient for him to look through the content in consideration of the development of language skills rather than evaluating the review for its appraisal on the employment of hi-tech advancements in the movie.

2.3.1 Reviews with the Constraint of In-class Use

As language development being the core focus, this exercise can be limited to the use of classroom practice alone; these reviews, as they are not on a par with professional film reviews, should not be brought to the attention of social media in view of promoting or demoting a particular product or person. Hence, utmost discretion should be followed when these reviews are made for language learning purposes.

2.4 Speaking Descriptive or Reporting Language though not Performative Utterances

Movie reviews can be an ideal exercise for oral presentations. When the selection of the movies for review is purely based on personal interest, the objective is quite easily accomplished or justified, i.e., making the learners speak. With less than 20-minute time frame, the review of a movie can be efficiently delivered for the purpose. It is a worthy exercise for their comprehensive film knowledge when the students consider other movies for comparison in corresponding segments. Also, the language of technology is significantly brought into use owing to the inclusion of technology in the movies. The reviewers are more inclined to use descriptive or reporting language. Hence, Performative Language is not much forced here as in the case of drama, interview or elocutionary performances (Stewart, 2006).

2.5 Oral Presentation as Groups or Individuals

The reviews can also be designed in the form of group presentation because the character of the task has a large scope to invite team work and encourage discussion. And it also gives an equal opportunity for everyone to present their points. When they work as team, the presentation concerning the subsections of the review can be equally divided among the team members. The instructor also chances to switch the roles of the presenters every time. This practice will hone their cumulative knowledge of the film. After assuming the roles and responsibilities, the students are inclined to undergo Internet search to gain the necessary information which would exhibit a fair amount of their enthusiasm in doing the work. Similarly, the whole gamut of presentation skills can be efficiently achieved when an individual takes charge of rendering the entire review by himself.

2.6 Reviews in the Form of Group Discussion or Debate

It is apparent that movies have been a subject of discussion for students in their everyday talk. To a certain extent, this custom has been an ideal platform for incidental learning. Now, considering the interest of the movie lovers and with an application of little formality and lenient structure, the reviews can also be executed in the form of group discussion or debate. When each section of the movie is put on the table for discussion, the members of the group chance to ascertain and broaden their comprehension of the movie from technical and non-technical perspectives. During the discussion, they also give their viewpoints about the employment of technical and non-technical elements in the movie. The interesting areas for debate can be the background of the problems, rationale for the inclusion of the problematic content, propagation and projection, analysing proper and improper use of technical features, justification for star cast, costumes, musical elements, special effects, narrative techniques, promotional activities, etc. Also, when movies are reviewed for

their controversial content in debates, they might deliver diverse social, ethical and professional interpretations.

2.7 Listening and Reading Tests

Listening and reading comprehension can also be broadly tested after the students' exposure to an existing movie review or any movie review by their peers as groups or individuals. The questions can either be closed-ended or open-ended or even both.

2.7.1 Closed-ended Questions

2.7.1.1 Dichotomous Questions

In closed-ended question pattern, dichotomous questions with the typical 'yes' or 'no' response play a crucial role to validate the perception of the reader or listener over the content. For example,

Does the reviewer fetch any other film source/s for comparison?

- Yes
- No

Age-restriction is strongly recommended in the review.

- Yes
- No

The review ends with a rating.

- Yes
- No

Other than 'yes' or 'no' type questions, there can also be many other closed-ended questions:

2.7.1.2 Multiple Choice Questions

Which among the following can be the major crowd-pulling factor of the movie, according to the reviewer?

- Rib-tickling comedy track
- Scintillating background music
- Gripping screenplay
- Unpredictable climax

2.7.1.3 Rank Order Scaling Question

Arrange the following in the order mentioned by the speaker:

- Name of the producing company
- Number of songs
- Date of release
- Film cast
- Number of fight sequences
- Movie title

2.7.1.4 Likert Scale Question

The final remark given by the reviewer on the movie:

Waste of time and money	Wait to watch in TV	So-so	Worth-watching	Must-see. Don't miss it!
1	2	3	4	5

2.7.2 Open-ended Questions

The following short questions can be given as an in-class listening or reading test to reveal their understanding on the movie reviews by drawing informative, descriptive and explanatory answers in open-ended question style:

- When and where is the story set? And explain the significance of it, according to the reviewer's observation.
- How does the reviewer describe the genre of the movie?
- What are the positive and negative elements of the movie according to the reviewer?
- What is the reviewer's view on the justification of movie title?
- How does the reviewer conclude the review and rate the movie?
- In what respect/s does the reviewer compare and contrast the movie with other film source/s?

- Which features of the movie seem novel and praiseworthy according to the reviewer?
- Which features of the movie are conventional and repetitive according to the reviewer?

2.8 Writing

A study conducted on the vocabulary learning strategy by Xu and Hsu (2017) identifies summarizing as one of the subgroups of cognitive strategies that defines it as an act of "intermittently synthesising what one has heard to ensure the information has been retained." Here, the instructor can introduce the learners to resourceful movie data websites such as imdb.com, metacritic.com, rottentomatoes.com and ign.com. They offer excellent reviews that the students can follow. While going through the web sources, the students chance to read mixed reviews, i.e. reviews from famed film critics as well as users. Additionally, many of the Indian dailies feature movie reviews in their weekly editions. Regular magazines and film magazines also dedicate a number of pages for movie reviews. The experience of browsing through the reviews certainly will help them form a set of ideas on their own, knowing the boundaries of the assignment. The conventional movie review format can be adopted when writing the reviews. There is plenty of scope for enhancing the writing skills of the learners; many forms of writing exercises can be given in the classrooms. For example, cloze tests and reading comprehension passages can test and ensure their understanding when given with appropriate context clues. Context clues embedded in the text will definitely help the learners to reassure their grasp over the text. Translation is another promising domain that can be intensely concentrated for language enhancement; the reviews written in the regional language can be translated into the target language and vice versa. This will immensely help the learners pick up their fluency in writing particularly when they desperately give consideration to appropriate phrases and expressions in the second language.

2.9 Wide Scope for Lexical Gains and Refinement of Language

The practice of reading or watching movie reviews immensely contribute to their incidental vocabulary acquisition. The study conducted by Bisson, Heuven, Conklin and Tunney (2015) proved that pictorial information has a potential space in incidental vocabulary learning. It was even more advantageous to the learners when the pictorial information is blended with written content. The previous researches on incidental vocabulary learning through reading have asserted that repetition of unfamiliar phrases and the condition in which these words occur enable vocabulary development (Teng, 2016). Jameel Ahmad (2012) asserts that incidental vocabulary endorses deeper mental processing and better retention. The students make excellent use of the context clues when they get themselves actively engaged in the course of deciphering the meaning. They think and rethink about the new expressions involving cognitive process that facilitates the students to keep hold of the words for a longer period of time. He further adds:

"Cognitive process includes both receptive and productive aspects of vocabulary. Learners understand not only the meanings in the given text but the related grammatical patterns, common lexical sets and typical association of the word with the context. Learning vocabulary through extensive reading also improves learners' fluency. Learners look at group of words rather than each individual word while reading."

Accordingly, the reading or watching exercise can significantly expand their active vocabulary and in the process, they also become adept at using the right terminology or vocabulary to express a broad conceptual idea; For instance, when they are informed of the different genres of the movie and they learn to use handy phrases such as 'love triangle', 'eponymous' or 'titular' character, 'coming-of-age story', 'denouement', etc. This means that the learners might unconsciously know the meaning of such terms and be using it explanatorily without being aware of the existence of the right words that best express those whole ideas. In addition, at times, the phrases that are used in movie reviews do find their place when we comment on a work of literature. For example, the literary genre *bildungsroman* is a specific subgenre of 'coming-of-age story'.

2.10 Flipped Classroom

The entire activity of movie reviewing can be thought of being delivered in 'flipped classroom' mode. The materials can be distributed to the learners online about modeling a sample movie review. As this practice adopts the principles of incidental learning, there need not be any explicit instructions outlining the learning outcomes. When the students take part in the process of writing or speaking, it is natural that they might summon the words they learned in the samples. Also, when students come ready with their reviews, a discussion or evaluation can be easily triggered in the classroom. The proposition here is that the learners become interested when such a practice and familiar content of this sort is introduced and exposed to them even before the class hours. The flipped model also proves that this early exposure builds in time for learners to mull over and get acquainted with the content before vigorously experiencing it in class.

2.11 Formative Feedback From Peers

During movie reviews, the students can undergo a number of non-assessment tasks such as receiving formative feedback from their peers and facilitator. This will substantially help them identify their strong and weak areas and improve their presentation skills every so often.

3. Conclusion

"Incidental learning in second language acquisition is often classified as a type of learning that does not require learners' attention, awareness and control, where the learner's focus is on conveying meanings rather than on language forms or grammar rules" (Melani, 2018). In order to commendably enrich students' second language learning experience, the necessity to develop their interest in acquiring English language should be given a huge amount of focus and priority (Chien, Yunus & Mohammad, 2018). Through this qualitative exploratory research approach, we strongly believe that movie reviewing is one auspicious segment of incidental learning that the language practitioners should definitely take into consideration. Correspondingly, by presenting various teaching and learning strategies through this approach, the acquisition of second language promises to be evidently effortless, i.e., without the stress of committing oneself to intentional or deliberate learning.

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