Application of Video Teaching in the English Classes of the Military Academy

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Abstract. A stronger capacity in English information acquisition and cross-cultural communication is requisite for naval officers in new times. This paper analyzes the difficulties the midshipmen have met in listening comprehension and speaking. It also expatiated on the advantages of English teaching through videos basing on psychological theories. In this paper, it summarizes the potential problems of the application of this teaching method. At last, it puts forward four suggestions on the effective use of English teaching through videos.

Keywords: English; English teaching through videos; midshipman.

1. Introduction

With the enhancement of China’s comprehensive national strength and the continuous improvement of its international status, our navy’s foreign military cooperation and exchanges are becoming increasingly frequent. In recent years, the external training tasks such as foreign military aid, military trade, military training, and military exercises are constantly undertaken by the Navy. So cross-cultural communication skills are becoming increasingly important for demonstrating the image of our navy. Listening comprehension, oral English and cultural knowledge are necessary for effective cross-cultural communications.

Military academies are the source of future naval officers. So college English and naval English courses are important battlefields for cultivating modern naval officers. The new era has placed higher demands on students’ English information acquisition and cross-cultural communication abilities. Video Teaching with authentic English material is considered an efficient method for improving the listening comprehension, oral English and cultural knowledge accumulation. This paper evaluates the advantages and potential problems of introducing video teaching into the naval academy, and provides suggestions for practical application.

2. Analysis of Difficulties in Listening and Speaking Skills

Our students are from two major sources—high school graduates and enlisted men from military forces. Generally, high school graduates are with better basic English skills. In order to make teaching more targeted, our academy currently implements graded teaching of English. The grading is based on the English scores of the college entrance examination and entrance test. Most of the military students are assigned to the third grade due to their relatively weak English proficiency. However, in teaching practice, we have found that students with relatively high exam scores in the first and second grades still face difficulties in two main aspects—listening and speaking. This phenomenon can be explained partially by their English learning experience in the high school stage. Due to the fact that the college entrance examination does not include listening and speaking in many regions, these two skills are neglected. The college English teaching syllabus emphasizes the use of language as the teaching objective, while proposing the principle of English teaching in a communicative context. It is necessary for us to analyze the difficulties in college English listening and speaking skills.
2.1 Analysis of Difficulties in Listening Skills

Wilga MRivers, Harvard Linguistics Professor, once pointed out that the most basic ability in all communication activities is the ability to understand what others are saying. To speak English accurately, one must first listen carefully. According to a survey of undergraduate students who have taken the CET-4 exam for the first time in the past three years, 66% of students believe that listening comprehension is a significant weak spot. 46% of students believe that they have a fear of listening tests. 8% of students rely entirely on guessing in their CET-4 listening skills. This study finds out that there are three main reasons why listening has become a major obstacle for English learning: (1) The teaching method of instructor-playing-recordings-students-choosing-answers is monotonous. This method seriously restricts the students’ enthusiasm for in the whole process, the students are learning passively. (2) Students will encounter liaison, contraction and reduction and HDP (phoneme that is hard to be distinguished) in spoken English. Without a certain amount of practice, students cannot master these forms of phonetic changes. (3) Due to unfamiliarity with the living habits, social and cultural background, and slang and idioms of people in English speaking countries, although there are no difficult words in the materials heard, the content cannot be understood.

2.2 Analysis of Difficulties in Oral Skills

In teaching, we have found that when engaging in dialogue or coherent speech on familiar topics, students are exposed to two major problems: first is poor pronunciation and intonation. They are unable to pronounce basic vocabulary or some more complex vocabulary, and they speak in strange tones; Secondly, there is a lack of logical thinking and cultural literacy, resulting in inappropriate speech and narrow thinking.

Based on the analysis of the above problems, the author believes that there are two main reasons: (1) their pronunciation is affected by the pronunciation habits of their native language. The pronunciation of English and Chinese is not exactly the same. Some sounds in English are indeed present in Chinese, some are similar to Chinese sounds, and some sounds are completely absent in Chinese. The pronunciation habits of Chinese as the mother tongue are deeply ingrained for learners, and they will inevitably transfer to English, affecting their mastery of the phonetic characteristics of English. Our students come from all over the country, and the differences between the pronunciation systems of various dialects and English pronunciation systems bring even greater difficulties to teaching, such as inaccurate pronunciation of vowels, inability to distinguish between consonants /l/ and /n/, difficulty in consonant concatenation, serious phenomena of adding and swallowing sounds, flat intonation and lack of rhythm in reading or speaking. (2) The traditional college English classroom focuses on the construction of basic language knowledge, and less on people's personalities, emotions, values, and religious beliefs from different cultural backgrounds, failing to achieve an organic combination of language basic skills training and cultural knowledge implantation. Therefore, it is difficult for students to flexibly apply cultural background knowledge in actual communication.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that a considerable portion of English teaching in our academy has not met the requirements of the Syllabus, therefore cannot effectively improve the English proficiency of students. Next, we will explore whether video teaching can promote English teaching in the military academy.

3. Theoretical basis of psychology

3.1 Theoretical basis of educational psychology

The psychological state theory in education suggests that students always receive education in a certain psychological state. Everyone's psychological state is different, and their acceptance of
education is also different. For example, when students are happy, focused, and have quick thinking, they are more likely to receive education; On the contrary, if one feels depressed and mentally sluggish, the impact of education is difficult to internalize.

The traditional teaching method of college English involves students recording the language knowledge taught by the teacher in the classroom, repeatedly reciting and memorizing it, and then practicing a large number of exercises... In this way, the language loses its lively and practical nature, and becomes a rigid written symbol. As a result, students find the classroom dull and boring, leading to inattention and low learning efficiency. The strength of film and television teaching methods lies in the combination of rational thinking activities with certain emotional experiences. During the learning process, the student's entire nervous system is in a highly excited state, and the various organizational systems throughout the body are coordinated, enabling them to pay high attention and think agilely.

3.2 Basis of Memory Psychology

Memory is the fundamental condition of the entire psychological activity. In teaching activities, the success or failure of teaching effectiveness depends not only on the student's understanding of the knowledge learned, but also on their memory and mastery of the knowledge. Psychologists believe that memory is completed through the activity of the cerebral cortex and belongs to the central nervous system of the brain. The law of human thinking is from image to abstraction, from intuitive understanding to rational understanding. Czech educator Comenius regards intuitive teaching as the golden rule of teaching work. Intuitiveness is to allow students to see and hear specific things, in order to strengthen the stimulation of the central nervous system and achieve the effect of enhancing understanding and visual memory. During the process of learning English language and cultural knowledge, students should follow these rules to understand and remember.

Film and television teaching combines images, text, sound, and emotions, with significant intuitiveness, thus comprehensively stimulating multiple sensory systems of students. Perceived things are reproduced in the minds of students, and their memory is based on specific images, so their memory of knowledge is firm and not easily forgotten.

3.3 Basis of Communication Psychology

According to Thomas, in verbal communication, if a speaker fails to choose words and make sentences according to standard grammatical coding patterns, they are at most considered to be speaking poorly; But if the discourse is not handled according to pragmatic principles, he will be considered as “behaving poorly” and “an insincere, deceitful, or malicious person.” Birdwistle, a representative of body language research in the United States, believes that nonverbal communication plays a crucial role in the field of communication in the expression of meaning and emotions. It includes posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, body movements, clothing, images, volume, time, and so on. Like language, nonverbal communication is also a component of culture and is based on a certain culture.

Different ethnic cultures have differences in national psychology, forming different personalities, emotions, values, and religious beliefs within their cultural backgrounds, and subtly influencing people's thinking, language, and behavior. Therefore, simply learning English phonetics, grammar rules, and mastering a certain amount of vocabulary in college English classrooms does not necessarily mean that students have learned the foreign language and are able to communicate smoothly. In cross-cultural communication, if learners cannot integrate into another cultural background, they are prone to confusion or misunderstandings, resulting in communication barriers and language translation barriers.

British and American films originate from life and inevitably reflect many aspects of their national culture. By appreciating English movies, students can enhance their understanding of the culture and social customs of English speaking countries.
4. Possible problems in video teaching in the military academy

4.1 Difficulty in meaning acquiring

According to a survey conducted on undergraduate students in our academy, over 90% students believe that for the first time of watching, they usually understand the content based on Chinese subtitles, or guess the plot based on the body language and facial expressions of characters, with very little absorption and processing of language information. The study indicates that the main reason for this is the inherent language characteristics of film and television works. In order to promote the development of its own storyline, to highlight and enhance cultural background and social content, a film and television work often adopts various forms of language means, such as fast and fluent language speed and expressions that do not conform to written grammar, and even a large number of colloquial slang, so it often lacks appropriate ladder and hierarchy. During relatively concentrated time, students will be exposed to language expressions that are both very difficult and easy. For difficult content that involves difficult words and complicated grammar, students find it difficult to acquiring the meaning.

4.2 Impact on military values

Due to differences in social systems, ethnic customs, lifestyle habits, especially values, British and American film and television films inevitably have certain limitations and even negative aspects. For example, some films contain elements that contradict the healthy socialist lifestyle and the spirit of striving upwards. Excessive exposure may shake students' communist beliefs and weaken their analytical and discriminative abilities; For example, some students may not have a good understanding of the background, social and ethnic characteristics of the story, which may lead to misunderstandings during the appreciation process of film and television. They often make incorrect reactions based on their own biases and ignorance.

5. The Application of Video Teaching in the Military Academy

5.1 Selection of videos

Military academies are the main battlefield for cultivating qualified and highly skilled military officers. Political education is a major principle of our military. Military academies should always prioritize ideological and political education, guide students to establish correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values. We should cultivate students' excellent qualities of obeying the Party's commands, patriotism, and dedication, and foreign language teaching should also follow this principle. Therefore, it is necessary to select videos that contribute to the cultivation of military qualities, incorporate ideological education into video teaching, and truly turn knowledge into energy.

5.2 Teacher's task

Through lesson preparation, Teachers should have a thorough understanding of the background knowledge, characters, story summaries, and dialogues of exciting scenes in the selected video, as well as the language and cultural knowledge in them. The role of a teacher has shifted from a lecturer to an organizer and supervisor of activities. Efforts should be made to create a language environment that integrates authenticity, communication, knowledge, and fun, and organize students to engage in English situational activities such as discussions, debates, speeches, dialogues, and role-playing.

Teachers should also take advantage of certain cultural differences reflected in the videos and seize the opportunity to explain corresponding cultural customs and humanistic philosophy to students, in order to enhance their sensitivity and vigilance towards cross-cultural differences. In the
movie Forrest Gump, students not only learn about the national conditions, customs, single parent families, and university life involved, but also learn about major historical events such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Civil War, the assassination of the US President, the Black Movement, the Vietnam War, the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States, and the Watergate Incident. The task of a teacher is ultimately to achieve an organic combination of film and television appreciation and the cultivation of basic language skills, as well as an organic combination of language basic skill training and cultural knowledge implantation. Only in this way can videos serve as a teaching tool for specific teaching purposes instead of an entertainment tool.

5.3 Subtitles for videos

The author believes that videos with large plot fluctuations, relatively complex language, and fast speech speed, subtitles should be provided. Due to relying solely on sound and visuals, students often cannot accurately grasp the content of the work, making it difficult to understand and appreciate. This can even cause tension among students, which is not conducive to the generation of learning interest and the establishment of learning confidence.

Currently, most English original movies in China use Chinese subtitles. Overall, Chinese subtitles have two limitations: (1) It is difficult to find Chinese subtitles that are appropriate from beginning to end in many films, and imprecise Chinese subtitles have the potential to mislead students. (2) Students are prone to developing a mentality of dependence on Chinese subtitles, either watching Chinese subtitles first and then listening to English, or simply bypassing the listening comprehension stage and interpreting the plot directly through watching subtitles, which greatly reduces the effectiveness of listening training.

5.4 Playing mode

As a means of teaching, films should not be limited to simple viewing. Teachers can adopt different playback methods based on the teaching purpose and plan: (1) Full screening. The instructor can present some fully prepared comprehension questions to the students, and the students can look for answers to the questions while reading, aiming to give the students an overall understanding of the content they are reading. (2) Classic clip replay. After watching the film, classic segments can be selected for replay teaching, with the aim of strengthening students' language or cultural memory. (3) Silent screening. Only playing the screen without accompanying sound aims to focus the students on the screen, allowing them to imagine the dialogue that each character or scene should match based on their memory. (4) No image projection. Contrary to silent screening, students only hear sound without any visuals, allowing them to focus on the dialogue of audio-visual materials, the speaker's pronunciation, and intonation. (5) Freeze frame screening. After understanding the video clips, freeze a certain scene and let students guess how the plot will develop next, so that students can have something to say.

6. Summary

Film and television is an art form that mainly focuses on images, combining people, scenery, objects, sound, light, and color. The language of films and televisions is a comprehensive reproduction that has widely absorbed other artistic languages, and after being processed by film and television, it is strengthened to be more charming. Practice has proven that the knowledge gained by students from film and television is often more and faster, profound and solid than that gained from books. College English video culture teaching is an optimized teaching method that is conducive to cultivating students' three-dimensional thinking and building a smooth bridge between theory and practice. By understanding the beauty of classical art, teaching English language, and cultivating the soul of new military talents, our navy students can adapt their foreign language proficiency to the higher requirements of the new military transformation.


References


